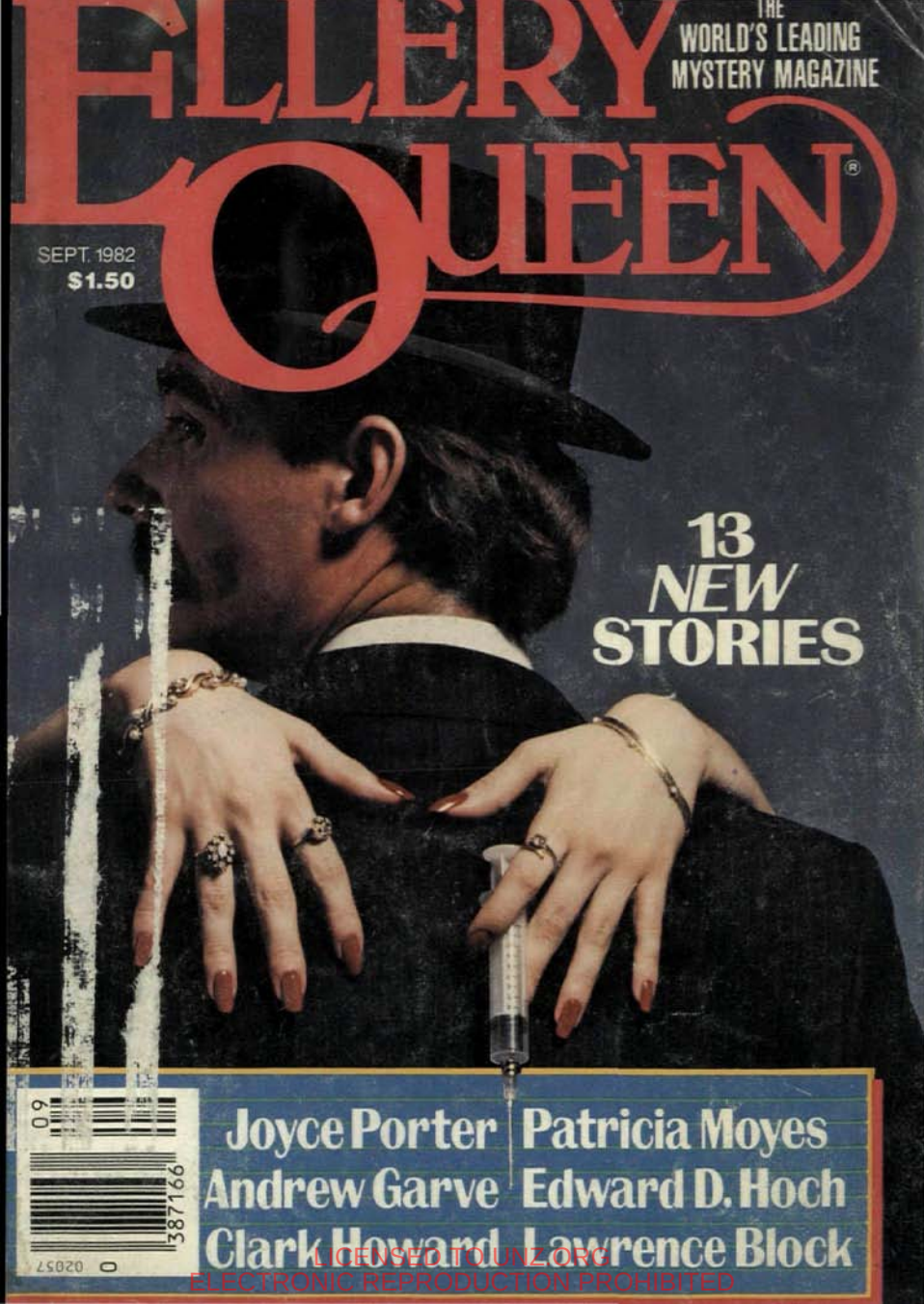

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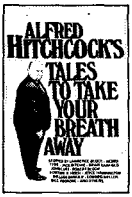

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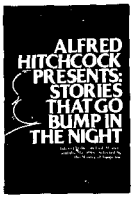

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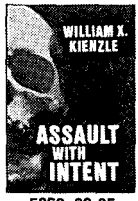

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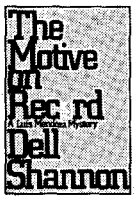

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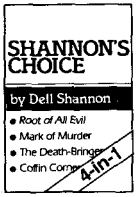

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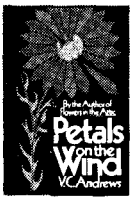

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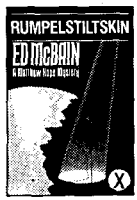

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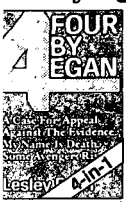

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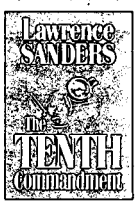

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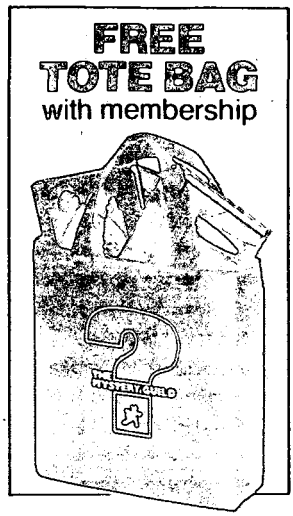

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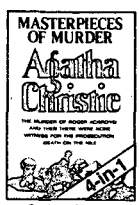

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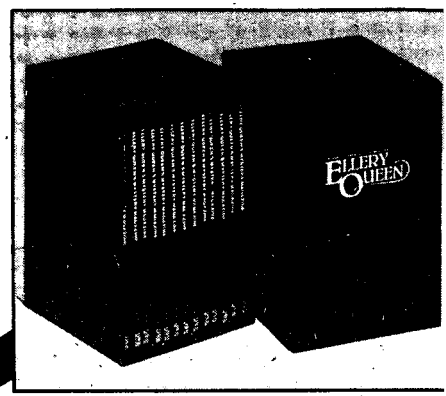

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A *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Watching the flames reflecting off the low clouds casting an orange glow over one whole end of the city, Captain Leopold was glad he wasn't a fireman. When the phone rang with the news of the shootings at headquarters he didn't envy himself being a cop . . .

ONE MOMENT OF MADNESS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The rain had stopped but the night air was still muggy with August heat. Leopold stood by the window in his pajamas, silently cursing the window air-conditioner that still hummed loudly but delivered only warm air. Acrosstown there was a fire burning, and as he listened to the distant sound of sirens he tried to pinpoint its location. Something in the Mill Road Shopping Center, he guessed—one of the stores.

He was glad he wasn't a fireman.

For a time he watched the flames reflecting off the low clouds, casting an orange glow over one whole end of the city. He was just turning to get back into bed when the telephone rang.

"Leopold here."

"Captain, you'd better get down here." It was Fletcher's voice, talking too loud.

"What's up? Is it the fire?"

"Hank Schultz just went berserk in the squadroom and shot four people!"

"I'll be right down! You got it under control?"

"I shot Hank, Captain. There was no other way."

"All right. I'll be there in ten minutes."

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He was dressed and down to his car in less than five. The highrise building where he lived was generally a fifteen-minute drive away from headquarters, but at three in the morning traffic was light. He stuck the magnetized flasher on the roof of his car and turned it on, and held his speed steady at fifty-five all the way downtown.

There were ambulances and cars all over the street in front of the aging headquarters building. He recognized a couple of reporters trying to buck the hastily erected police line. "What's up, Captain?" one of them shouted, recognizing him, but Leopold ignored him. At the moment he couldn't imagine what was up. Hank Schultz was a nine-year veteran of the Force who'd done various sorts of undercover work in addition to regular patrol duty. Though he'd never been on Leopold's Violent Crimes Squad, Leopold knew him well.

"Coming through!" a white-coated stretcher-bearer shouted, and Leopold stepped aside. The man on the stretcher, who seemed to be unconscious, was Hank Schultz. Leopold hurried up the steps to the second floor and found Lieutenant Fletcher standing in the middle of the squadroom surveying the damage. A chair was overturned and there was blood on the floor and one of the walls. The police photographer was snapping pictures of one uniformed body, but Leopold couldn't see who it was.

"How many dead?" he asked grimly.

Fletcher glanced up as if surprised that Leopold had arrived so soon. "One. Sam Bentley over there. We think he took the first shot."

Leopold had known Sergeant Bentley since the day twenty years earlier when Leopold came up from New York to join the Force in the city where he grew up. Bentley was on the Force already then. Now he was only a year from retirement. "Who else did Hank shoot?"

"Unidentified white male prisoner and the two detectives who brought him in. Sweeney and Gross. They're not bad, but the prisoner has two wounds. Hank emptied his service revolver before I could stop him."

"Is Hank alive?"

"Just barely. All four of them are at the hospital."

Leopold walked over and stared down at the body of Sam Bentley. He felt like hell. "You'd better tell me the whole thing, from the beginning." The Police Commissioner would be arriving soon and he wanted to have some answers.

"We don't know a great deal, Captain. I was in my office. Things were fairly quiet and Bentley was at his desk typing up an arrest

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report. A little after two-thirty Sweeney and Gross came in with their prisoner. Then Hank Schultz came in."

"Was he in uniform?"

"No, civilian clothes. I don't think he was on duty. I heard them talking but I didn't pay much attention. Sam had just gotten a report on the Crown SuperShopper fire out at the shopping center and was telling them about it. I happened to look out through my glass partition just as Hank drew the revolver from under his jacket and fired. I couldn't believe what I was seeing! But then Sam fell against the wall and went down. Hank kept firing at the others and everybody was yelling at once. I ran out of the office, drawing my gun. Sweeney and Gross were both on the floor by now, along with their prisoner—I hadn't counted the shots. Hank turned and pointed his revolver at me and—I had to shoot him, Captain! His gun was already empty but I didn't know that." Fletcher's voice was trembling.

"You had no choice," Leopold said, resting a hand on his shoulder. "I would have done the same thing."

"I was drinking coffee with him just last night—"

Others were arriving now—the Commissioner and someone from the District Attorney's office. Leopold didn't have any answers for them. He greeted them briefly and said he was on his way to the hospital.

"This will look terrible in the papers," the Commissioner said.

"It *is* terrible."

"How could a rational man just flip out like that? Could he be on drugs?"

"I'm going to find out," Leopold promised.

The Commissioner stared bleakly at the blood on the floor and the wall. It seemed to bother him more than the sight of Sam Bentley's body.

Leopold went downstairs to his car. It was a short drive to the hospital and the four wounded men were still in Emergency when he arrived. He found a doctor named Rice working with an intern over Milt Sweeney, who seemed to be the least injured of the four.

"Can I speak to him?" Leopold asked when the doctors came out of the curtained cubicle for a moment.

"As soon as we get him stitched up. He's lucky—the bullet passed through the fleshy part of his thigh."

"How are the others?"

The doctor consulted an admissions sheet. "Schultz is bad. We're preparing him for surgery now. The other officer, Gross, has an

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abdominal wound but I think he'll pull through. The woman is unconscious—"

"What woman?"

"Beats me. Unidentified. A woman dressed in man's clothing."

"She was brought in with the others? From Police headquarters?"

"That's right. We didn't know she was a woman at first. She's fairly young, I'd say—under thirty."

He excused himself and went back into the cubicle, and Leopold paced the floor. Perhaps Sweeney could shed some light on this craziness. He certainly hoped so.

Some minutes later the doctor emerged and motioned to Leopold. "You can have five minutes with him, no more. He's still weak from loss of blood."

Leopold nodded, pushed aside the white curtain, and went in. "Hi, Milt," he said. "How're you feeling?"

Sweeney managed a lopsided grin. "I'll live. What about the others?"

"Gross will be all right, I understand. Sam Bentley's dead."

"God!"

"I'm sorry I had to tell you like this."

"What about Schultz? I didn't see a thing after he shot my leg out from under me."

"Fletcher got him in the chest. They're taking him to the operating room now."

"Why in hell did he do it!"

Leopold sighed. "I was hoping you could tell me."

"We'd just come in with our prisoner. Sam was behind his desk talking about a fire somewhere and all of a sudden there was Hank Schultz out of nowhere, taking his gun from the belt holster under his jacket."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing I can remember. I think Bentley put out his hand to grab for the gun. Schultz shot him first and then turned on me and kept on firing. I felt a blow to my leg and just went down."

"What about the suspect you'd brought in?"

"Was he hit too?"

"Yes. But the doctor says it's a woman dressed in man's clothes!"

"What?" Sweeney struggled to sit up, but winced in pain and abandoned the effort. "A *woman?*"

Leopold nodded. "What did you arrest her for?"

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"Gross and I were checking the after-hours bars on Field Avenue. We were parked in front of the Old Athens when this guy—we thought it was a guy—came along and threw an empty bottle through the front window of the bar. We jumped out and grabbed him. We figured we had a drunk on our hands and we drove downtown to book him."

"Did Hank seem to know your prisoner?"

"I wouldn't know. Like I said, I didn't even see him until he was there pulling out his gun."

The doctor appeared at the curtain. "Better let him get some rest now. You can see him again in the morning."

Leopold squeezed Sweeney's shoulder. "Take it easy, Milt. I'll be back."

"Right, Captain. Find out why he did it, huh?"

"I'm trying."

Outside, Leopold asked the doctor, "How's the woman?"

"Not so good, but we think she's got a better than even chance. Any luck on identification?"

"Not a thing. Let me look at her clothes."

The doctor led him to a little cubicle and opened a garment bag bearing a numbered label and the single word UNIDENTIFIED. Leopold noticed the fresh blood around the hole in the front of the coat and shirt. Otherwise the man's suit was reasonably clean and nondescript, with a label from a cut-rate men's store downtown. "Did the clothes seem to fit her?" Leopold asked.

"I guess so, yes. But I wasn't really paying attention to their fit," Rice answered.

"I'm wondering if she bought them for herself or got them from somebody," Leopold murmured, going through the pockets. They were empty except for a handkerchief, a few coins, and a crumpled five-dollar food stamp. "Any sign of drug addiction on her?" Leopold asked.

"Not that I noticed."

A young intern poked his head in. "Dr. Rice, they're waiting for you in the operating room."

Rice told Leopold, "I'm assisting at the operation on Schultz. I have to scrub now."

"Good luck," Leopold said, meaning it.

He waited in the corridor until they wheeled Hank Schultz past him. The young detective's eyes were closed and his breathing

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seemed irregular. An intern with an intravenous bottle walked alongside.

Damn it, Hank, Leopold asked silently, why did you do it?

In the morning, while Fletcher dealt with the press as best he could, Leopold began the arduous task of reconstructing Hank Schultz's recent activities. He had been, Leopold learned, doing some undercover narcotics work, but his superior officer believed he'd veered away into something else.

"He was onto a new line," Lieutenant Maxwell told Leopold. "On one of his drug busts he discovered the shipment had been paid for with a hundred thousand dollars in stolen food stamps."

Food stamps.

Leopold remembered the crumpled food stamp in the unidentified woman's pocket. "When was this?"

"About two months ago. He told me he had a line on the source of the stolen stamps and asked to be taken off the narcotics angle to pursue it. I contacted the proper federal agencies and they gave me the go-ahead. In fact, Schultz was supposed to meet with a man from the Justice Department today regarding his investigation."

"It doesn't sound as if he was having emotional problems of any sort."

"No apparent ones," Maxwell agreed. "He was doing his job. I'm as dumbfounded as anyone else by what happened this morning."

"And yet something caused him to draw his revolver and shoot four people. What was it?"

"Damned if I know. In this business, sometimes the strain builds up over weeks and months until suddenly it explodes."

"I know," Leopold agreed. "But that answer won't be good enough for the Commissioner."

"What are Hank's chances of living to tell us about it?"

"He was still in the operating room when I left the hospital at four o'clock. I'm going back over there now."

With the coming of morning the emergency room had quieted down to its usual summer pace of children with broken arms and cut feet. Leopold asked for Dr. Rice and was directed to an office on the second floor, where he found the surgeon staring bleakly into an empty coffee cup.

"A long night?" Leopold asked.

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Rice nodded. "We lost Schultz a half hour ago. He survived the surgery but died in the recovery room."

Leopold shook his head sadly. "Can I use your phone?"

"I've already called the Police Commissioner."

"I want to tell the man who shot him," Leopold said.

He dialed the squadroom number but was told Fletcher had finally gone home for some sleep. Leopold hesitated a moment and then dialed Fletcher's home number, hoping Fletcher would answer instead of his wife. He was in luck.

"Hello, Fletcher. How are you?"

"I'm exhausted, Captain. I'm going to sleep for a week."

"Hank Schultz died a half hour ago," Leopold told him. "I thought you'd want to know."

"Thanks. I guess he's been dead for me since the minute I shot him."

"Try to get some sleep."

Leopold hung up and turned back to Dr. Rice. "How about the others?"

"Gross is coming along, and the woman is conscious now. Do you want to see her?"

"I certainly do."

Rice escorted him to a private room on the third floor. "I'll want a guard posted here," he told the doctor. "I'll arrange for it."

"Okay. You can have five minutes alone with her."

Leopold entered the room and walked over to the bed. He saw at once that the woman was awake, watching him with deep-blue eyes that he might have found attractive in other circumstances. She must have been in her late twenties. Her brown hair was cut short as a man's, but Leopold couldn't imagine that Sweeney and Gross had failed to realize she was a woman. Her high cheekbones and soft features contributed to a decidedly feminine appearance.

"I'm Captain Leopold," he told her, "investigating last night's shooting."

"I don't know what happened," she said, closing her eyes.

"Let's start with your name. Who are you and why were you dressed as a man?"

"I'm Cathy Wright. I'm an artist and I wasn't dressed as a man. I was wearing my usual clothes. They had no right to arrest me."

"You broke the window of the Old Athens with a bottle," Leopold pointed out. "And unfortunately you did it right in front of an unmarked police car."

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"Whatever I did, I didn't deserve being shot."

"No," he agreed, "you didn't. The man who shot you was a detective named Hank Schultz. Does that name mean anything to you?"

"No. Should it?"

"He opened fire on you and several others without warning. I'm trying to find the reason."

"What happened to him?"

"He was shot by one of my men. He died a short time ago. But the doctor assures me you're going to be all right."

"Thanks," she said. Her eyes began to mist.

"I'll need your address for the records. I don't think you need to worry about the charges against you, though. Under the circumstances they'll probably be dropped."

She gave him an address in one of the older downtown areas, not far from where she'd been arrested. "I'd like to be alone now," she told him.

"Certainly," Leopold agreed. "But one other thing—there was a five-dollar food stamp in your pocket. Where'd you get it?"

"At the bank. Artists don't always make enough to live on."

Leopold nodded and left the room. He wasn't satisfied with the answers she'd given, but she was too weak to pursue it now. He'd come back later and maybe get some answers then. Maybe he'd find out why she seemed about to cry when he told her Hank Schultz was dead.

Detective Irving Gross was a middle-aged man with too much weight and too little hair. He'd been more seriously wounded than Sweeney. Lying flat on his back with a tube up his nose and another in his arm, he seemed wounded by more than Schultz's bullet.

"Schultz is dead," Leopold told him.

"That's no great loss, Captain. He was always an odd sort."

"In what way?"

"Oh, suspicious of everyone. Ever since his divorce a few years back after he caught his wife cheatin' he thought everybody was out to betray him or something. Beats me how Maxwell put up with him all these years."

"I never realized that. Maybe I didn't know him as well as I thought. But why'd he start shooting last night, Irving?"

"I thought maybe you came here to tell me."

"What about the suspect you and Sweeney arrested?"

"Guy broke a window with a bottle."

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"It was a woman, dressed more like a man."

"Yeah? Nothing surprises me in that neighborhood."

"Did Hank Schultz see her before he started shooting?"

"Sure, he saw her. She was standing right there with us."

"In handcuffs?"

"No, we took them off when we got her inside."

"Did Schultz speak to her?"

"Not a word."

"What was your impression when you arrested her—that she was high, drunk, or what?"

"Tell you the truth, Captain, it was none of those. My impression was that he—we thought it was a he—wanted to be arrested. You know, like the guy in the O. Henry story who wanted a warm cell for the winter?"

"I know," Leopold said. "Only this is summer."

He tried not to read the newspapers that night, with their screaming black headlines about the shooting. There were big pictures of Schultz and Bentley, smaller photos of Sweeney and Gross. They didn't have a picture of Cathy Wright, but a subhead referred to her as the "mystery woman" in the case. The story was given so much play on the front page that the fire at the Crown SuperShopper had been relegated to an inside page.

Leopold stayed late at headquarters in order to see Fletcher when he came on duty. That was how he happened to be at his desk when the man from the Justice Department arrived. His name was Arnold Ellis and he was a light-skinned black man with a tiny mustache.

He smiled as he shook hands and said, "Lieutenant Maxwell said you're the one to see. I understand you're in charge of the investigation into last night's tragic events."

"I seem to be," Leopold admitted.

"I flew up from Washington this afternoon to meet with Hank Schultz. That was before I knew he'd been killed."

"Maxwell told me you were working in the same area."

The man from Washington nodded. "Stolen food stamps. It's gotten to be a major problem, especially in urban areas. The underworld uses them like money, to buy narcotics and guns and just about everything else. For all practical purposes they are money, but in most instances they're a great deal easier to steal."

"But what finally happens to all these food stamps?" Leopold

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asked. "At the end of the line someone must redeem them for cash, knowing they're stolen."

"That's what Schultz was working on. We believe they're funneled into large supermarkets, probably at about twenty-five to fifty cents on the dollar. The store managers are happy to pocket the profit, with very little risk."

"Supermarkets," Leopold repeated. "Did you happen to hear about our fire last night?"

"Where was that?"

"At the Crown SuperShopper. It broke out just a little while before the shooting."

"Arson?"

"I don't know," Leopold said. "But I intend to find out."

"Let me come with you. I have to do something to justify my trip up here."

Leopold picked up a copy of the arson squad's report, which showed evidence that the Crown fire was of suspicious origin. He and Arnold Ellis drove out to look at the scene, but in the darkness there was little they could do or see. "Roof caved in," Leopold observed as they walked around the ruined building. "Looks like a total loss."

"A good way to destroy the evidence," Ellis remarked.

"What evidence?"

"A hundred thousand dollars in stolen food stamps. Someone knocked over our local distribution center last month, but we kept it out of the papers. It was no big deal. The place was in a parking garage behind the federal building. Someone who knew the setup just walked in during the lunch hour and helped himself. With a duplicate key all he had to do was stay out of the sight line of one television camera and he was home free."

This brought a whistle from Leopold. "Schultz was working on it?"

Ellis nodded. "His contacts told him the stamps were being redeemed through local supermarkets. I did a computer graph on the number of redemptions per market plotted against the relative income of the surrounding neighborhoods. Crown here had too many redemptions for its area. That's why I came here to meet Schultz today. I wanted to raid the place tomorrow on the strong possibility these latest stolen stamps were on the premises. I told Schultz on the phone we'd probably go after a search warrant tomorrow."

Leopold sighed and kicked at a piece of charred wood. "The trouble is, your Hank Schultz was a tough undercover cop who got results,

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but I'm left with one who went berserk in the squadroom and shot four people."

"It does sound like two different men. What about the supermarket manager? His name must be in the arson-squad report."

They went back to the car and checked. The name was there—Titus Kern, with an address in one of the better suburbs. "Business must be pretty good," Leopold remarked. "Let's go see him."

Arnold Ellis hesitated. "Not me. At this point in my investigation it's probably better if we don't meet. Keep it on a local level, but find out what you can."

Leopold dropped Ellis at his hotel downtown and drove out to see Titus Kern alone. It was nearly eleven when he reached the house, and it was dark. He was about to abandon the idea till morning when a taxi turned into the street and pulled up in front of the house. A man opened the door and paid the driver. Leopold got out. "Pardon me," he called as the man headed up the walk toward the darkened house. "Mr. Kern?"

The man hesitated, perhaps fearing a robbery. "Yes?"

"Captain Leopold, police. I'd like to ask you a few questions about last night's fire."

As he came closer, Leopold saw that Titus Kern was a man in his fifties, slim and gray-haired, with a high-cheekboned face that seemed vaguely familiar. "I've had a very trying day, Captain. I'm sure you understand. My store was destroyed by fire and I've just come from visiting my daughter who is ill. I'm sure I can't tell you anything you don't already know."

"I promise it won't take more than a few minutes."

Titus Kern sighed. "Very well. You can come in for a minute."

Leopold followed him into the large colonial house and waited while he turned on a few lamps in the living room. "My wife's away," he explained. "I'm something of a bachelor these days. Please sit down."

Leopold sat opposite the piano, where a number of family portraits were on display. "You must realize that last night's fire had a suspicious origin," he began. "The arson squad found evidence of a timing device—"

"I know nothing of that. I manage the store, I don't own it. The fire causes me grief, but the corporation collects the insurance."

"It's been suggested that the fire might have been set, not to collect the insurance but to destroy evidence of a felony."

"What? What are you talking about?"

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But before Leopold could reply, his eyes focused on the large middle portrait in the grouping on the piano. Suddenly he knew why Titus Kern's face was familiar. "That must be your daughter in the picture," he said. "She looks very much like you."

"I'm afraid she's a bit wild, like so many young people today."

"You said she was ill?"

"I—yes, that's correct."

"In the hospital, I imagine."

"Did I say that?"

"I met your daughter today, Mr. Kern. The picture is a very good likeness. She's using the name Cathy Wright and the newspapers call her a mystery woman."

"I told her to stop that foolishness and tell the truth."

Suddenly the pieces of the puzzle were beginning to fall into place. "What about Hank Schultz, Mr. Kern?"

"What about him? I never heard of him until he shot my daughter. And you can be sure the city's going to find itself with a very large lawsuit on its hands over this."

"How did you know it was your daughter in the hospital?"

"She telephoned me earlier this evening. I suppose she feared I'd report her missing to the police."

"Does she live here?"

"No, she has an apartment where she works as an artist. But she helps with some of my bookkeeping at the store." He glanced pointedly at his watch. "I'm very tired, and I can't see how these questions about my daughter have a bearing on the fire."

"There may be a connection between the fire and the shooting of your daughter," Leopold said. He got to his feet. "Thank you for your help, Mr. Kern."

In the morning Leopold went back to the hospital. He waited outside Cathy's door while Dr. Rice examined her. "She's coming along," the doctor said as he departed. "But try not to tire her with your questions."

Leopold went in and sat by the bed. "How are you feeling?"

"A little better than yesterday," she replied.

"I talked to your father last night."

Her face seemed to freeze. "I don't—"

"There's no point in denying your identity."

"All right, so you talked to my father. So what?"

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"I thought you might have something to tell me—about yourself and Hank Schultz."

"What are you talking about?"

"It was seeing you in the squadroom that set him off, wasn't it? He knew you well enough to recognize you even in men's clothes. Your handcuffs were off and he didn't realize you'd been arrested. He thought you were there to betray him, as another woman—his wife—had once betrayed him in a different way."

She started crying then, not holding back the tears that had threatened the day before, and Leopold turned for a moment to stare out the window. He remembered how he'd seen the fire burning from the window of his bedroom, and that reminded him of why he was here. He had a job to do. Hank Schultz had forgotten about his job and that had been his fatal flaw. He turned back to the sobbing girl.

"When Schultz stumbled onto the stolen-food-stamp racket he met you, didn't he? The two of you had the last couple of months for your special form of insanity."

"It wasn't insanity! It was love!"

"Hank stole that last batch of food stamps from the federal building garage, didn't he? And you helped. He needed your help because the stamps had to be funneled through your father's store. But a man named Ellis at the Justice Department used a computer and pinpointed Crown as redeeming more than its share of stamps for the income area it was in. Ellis wanted to get a search warrant and raid the store today. The stolen stamps were there and you couldn't get them out in time, so you had to burn the place down. If your father had been involved he could have removed them, but for some reason you couldn't reach them in time."

"I'd hidden them in the storeroom," she said listlessly, wiping her eyes with a tissue, "until it was safe to turn them in to the government. I had one in my pocket because we were trying to sell them elsewhere—but everyone was scared after the robbery, especially when there was nothing in the papers about it. We didn't know what the Justice Department was up to. So the stamps were there in my father's storeroom, and then Hank heard that Ellis had pinpointed Crown and wanted a search warrant. I could get in only when the store was open, and they were doing an inventory back there. I was helpless till Friday, and that would have been too late."

"How did you manage all this without your father knowing?"

"When I was doing the bookkeeping I handled things like food-stamp redemptions. I'd been buying them from people in my neigh-

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borhood for the past two years and selling them back to the government through his store. He never asked questions. He trusted me."

"And you were willing to burn down the store rather than lose that trust." When she didn't answer he went on. "You dressed in men's clothes to disguise yourself in case you were seen planting the firebombs behind the store. Then you broke a window while a couple of plainclothes cops were watching to give yourself a perfect alibi. If the fire was ever traced to you, you could claim you were in jail when it started. Of course, the arson squad recovered the remains of the timing device so the alibi wouldn't have held water, but you didn't know that."

"I wasn't thinking straight," she admitted. "Neither was Hank."

"He certainly wasn't. He walked into the squad room night before last and saw you with Sweeney and Gross. He probably never noticed what you were wearing. He'd probably gone through the day on the edge of insanity, fearful of what Ellis might do when he arrived from Washington. Then he saw you and thought you'd betrayed him, sold him out to save your own skin. He didn't wait for words. He drew his revolver and when Sergeant Bentley made a dive for it he got the first bullet. Then he shot you twice, and Gross and Sweeney, before Lieutenant Fletcher killed him."

"One moment of madness," she said, the tears spilling over again.

"Are you willing to talk about it?" Leopold asked. "Before a grand jury?"

"It'll be rough on me, won't it?"

"Not half as rough as it was on Hank Schultz."

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A *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

All the younger Lewicki had to offer Portia Fleming was youth and, possibly, love. The old man had money and power and a sure understanding of the girl's priorities . . .

WHERE WILL IT ALL END?

by WILLIAM BANKIER

I used to think there was something poetic in the way Stan Percival and I were always trying to con a few thousand dollars out of E. J. Lewicki, the Baytown millionaire. Lewicki led a charmed existence, kept turning the tables on us, and there was poetry in the justice that ensued.

Today, as I packed my bag for a flight to Paris, I asked myself a question. Why was I dancing once again to Stan's tune even though I disapprove of the heartless way he plays it? We now have enough of Lewicki's money to finance our film-writing for a couple of years. And no more interference from Mr. Lewicki. So I looked in the mirror at Joe Huck's slightly manic face and said out loud, "Where will it all end?"

This latest episode began in the broom-closet office on Ste. Catherine Street where Stan and I have worked and schemed ever since we invented our situation comedy for CBC Montreal television. Now that the series is dead, we're concentrating on writing and producing a feature film called *Battleship Potemkin.*

Yes, I know a Russian pioneer made cinema history with a film of that name. But *our* Battleship Potemkin is a heavyweight Russian boxer. Defected from the U.S.S.R. Olympic team. Fled to Israel. Came to Canada. We signed him up a couple of years ago and took

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him to Baytown, where we tricked Lewicki into sponsoring a bout between Potemkin and a local fighter.

All this is true except for one detail. Potemkin is really Asher Malkov, a former Moscow cabdriver, big and imposing but no fighter. When the boxing ploy failed, Mr. Lewicki surprised everybody by agreeing to bankroll our film venture. There were two reasons: he had come to like me and Stan—and he was infatuated with Portia Fleming.

Who is Portia, what is she? Miss Fleming is Stan's girl friend, but that's like saying Pete Rose is a baseball player. She is large and creamy smooth with a tidal wave of mahogany hair and a shape that causes the Metro trains to slow down thirty feet below the surface when she crosses the street. We met her when she played a minor part in our TV series. Unfortunately, Portia can't act and that was the nub of our problem.

"We have to do something," Stan growled. He was reclining in our collapsible garden chair, eyes closed, quart beer-bottle balanced on the stenciled face of Mark Twain that decorated the front of his tattered T-shirt. I was in my three-point posture at the typewriter, shiny shoes angled at forty-five degrees, white shirt unbuttoned at the collar, striped tie loosened a studied quarter of an inch, shark-skin jacket drying at the window after a steamy drive back from the film location.

"Do?" I asked. "What?" I'm afraid of any suggestions that come from my partner when he's in this mood. Afraid of and excited by.

"Get between Lewicki and Portia. She's wrapping him around her little finger. Every time I turn the page she's persuading him to pad her part."

"You're right. All of a sudden she's got more lines than a tennis court."

"The film will be a disaster if she gets any more to say." Stan tipped the beer bottle and began to drink. Then, with his eyes closed and the bottle pressed to his lips, he started to laugh. It was a disturbing sight, that huge torso rocking silently like a mammoth baby having a convulsion. I moved my shoeshine and my immaculate slacks out of range in case something exploded. "What's so funny?"

"I have the answer. Hand me the phone."

He dialed and I held my breath.

"Hello, Yves?" He was speaking to Yves Paquette, our actor friend, the one who impersonated the mayor of Montreal when we sold

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Lewicki the Jacques Cartier Bridge. That was our first big bunco and since then the blades of the fan have seldom been inactive.

"Got a little free-lance assignment for you, Yves. Can you do the Parisian film director, Claude Charpentier? I know he's taller than you are, but in this scenario Monsieur Charpentier does not appear. You'll be his voice only, on an overseas telephone call. Can do?" My partner grinned malevolently as he listened, then began explaining his sordid scheme.

After the telephone call, Stan and I went shopping for a birthday present for Mr. Lewicki. The party was happening that night at the Upper Westmount mansion of Darius Calhoun, the film's director. After years of directing TV commercials for cabbage shredders and flushable diapers, he was at last in charge of a feature film. A party for the financial backer was a natural way for Calhoun to show his gratitude.

As we shopped, I indicated a silver carriage clock in the window of Birk's. "Marvelous," Stan said. "Just the thing for a seventy-four-year-old man, a clock. Maybe we can get him an hourglass and a scythe to go with it."

We ended up investing in a humidor containing a hundred Cuban cigars at two bucks each, which probably included the C.I.A. excise charge when they were smuggled off the island. Thus equipped, we taxied up Cote des Neiges that evening, crossed the Boulevard, and negotiated the steep winding hill to Calhoun's house on the side of the mountain.

It was an intimate affair with an attendance of not more than a hundred and seventy-five. We helped ourselves to drinks and went in search of the guest of honor. He was enthroned in a Victorian wicker chair on the veranda overlooking the lights of the city. Snow-white hair lay deep and crisp and even over his handsome head. His face was the color of russet apples. No man in his seventies should look so disgustingly healthy.

We presented our gift. Lewicki made happy noises and had fun popping a stogie out of its tin tube. Portia got hold of it and secured the nomination for sexiest performance by a girl lighting a cigar. We left that location and returned to where the drinks were on offer.

"When does she get her phone call?" I asked Stan, sipping a glass of Calhoun's house red.

"I scheduled Yves for midnight," Stan said. "That's early morning in Paris. I read up on Claude Charpentier—he does all his important work over breakfast."

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"Are you sure you want her out of the rest of the film?"

"No option. E.J. will only give her more and more to say until our film ends up as audition time at the amateur dramatic society."

The sounds of enthusiasm coming from the veranda faded abruptly. The silence reminded me of that moment in Poe's "Mask of the Red Death" when the spectral figure appears in the last room. "Sad to think you and Portia were once so close," I said. "I can remember when you two danced in the office to the music of the central heating."

"Time stumbles on," Stan said. He raised his head. "What happened to the party?"

"I was wondering the same thing."

We went back out to the veranda and saw E.J. staring at a package on his lap as if it had six legs. The guests had fallen back from a newcomer—the son, the rival, the heir apparent to the Baytown construction empire, Harvey Lewicki. He was standing close to Portia, who was looking pink and pouty.

"All right, she invited you," the old man grumbled. "I would have appreciated some notice all the same."

"I didn't think I had to warn my father I was coming to his birthday party," Harvey said. He displayed a beery, glossy, Southern Ontario face. His tongue was functioning through a numbing infusion of alcohol. "And bringing him a present," he concluded.

All eyes turned to the package on Lewicki's lap. He did a compulsively frugal job of peeling away the wrapping, folding it neatly for next Christmas and handing it to Portia. She crumpled it and tossed it behind her chair. There was a box. Lewicki lifted the lid and drew out a carriage clock—not the silver one we had seen that afternoon but a gold one.

He set the clock on a table beside him and frowned at it. "That's what a man my age needs," he said. "A constant reminder of the passage of time."

Harvey looked hurt. "There used to be a clock at home, remember? I wound it too much and it never worked after that. You got so mad—"

"That was a thousand years ago."

"This is to replace it."

The old man stared at his son and I could sense a strong bond connecting them. It had a core of paternal and filial love but around it was wound a confused skein of irritations, resentments, and jealousies. It was, in fact, a fairly typical family relationship.

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If Lewicki had been trying to understand what he was feeling, he abandoned the attempt. "I suppose I'll find a use for it," he said. Calhoun was standing near the door. "You've got a mantelpiece, Darius. Here's a clock to put on it."

Our host stayed where he was, looking as if he'd just discovered a live sparrow in his pocket. The clock remained on the table. The younger Lewicki had tears in his eyes. "O.K., I tried," he said. He turned to Portia. "Thanks for telling me about the party. Now why don't we get the hell out of here?"

E.J. produced the smile of a winner. All his son had to offer Portia was youth and, possibly, love. The old man had money and power and a sure understanding of the girl's priorities. "Is that what this is all about?" he crowed. "You've come to lure Miss Fleming away? Again?" Throughout our encounters with Lewicki, Harvey had always been in the background, making pathetic efforts to protect his father from us, getting as close to Portia as he dared. This time she didn't wait to be asked.

"I can't go, Harve. I have to do this picture."

"When the picture's finished?"

"I can't promise anything."

Just then, Asher Malkov arrived. "Happy birthday, Mr. Lewicki, sir," he said. He handed the old man a box shaped like a necktie.

Our backer overflowed. "Here's my boy," he chortled, rising and grabbing Malkov in a bearhug. "Where have you been?"

Ever since the first day of filming, Lewicki had been treating the Israeli like an adopted son, tossing him the keys to the Rolls-Royce so he could drive to the village for cigarettes, treating him to dinner at Le Caveau. "Look at this great guy," he instructed the party guests, hanging a fatherly arm around those platform shoulders. "Have you ever seen such respect? I thought the younger generation had turned rotten till I met this one. What a sweetheart."

As Harvey Lewicki turned away, even Asher felt embarrassed. "Open your present, sir," he said.

"I bet it says Souvenir of Montreal on it," Stan muttered.

"And I bet Lewicki puts it on."

Harvey drifted out of sight and the party, which had never looked like taking off, bounced once or twice and rolled to a stop halfway down the runway. Just before midnight, the time appointed for Paquette's magic telephone call, Stan managed to corner E.J.

"I thought your son was trying to get through to you," he said, "but you pushed him away."

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"He got through to me years ago. All the way through and out the other side." The old man was quite drunk by now. Watery eyes surveyed the past. "I bought him a hydroplane and all he did was crash it and sink it in the bay."

I remembered TV news coverage of the event. This Lewicki dream had been that his son would win the Harmsworth Trophy over the measured mile at Picton. "You were glad he didn't drown," I recalled. "The camera showed you with your arms around each other."

The old man rejected that reminder. "He comes swaggering around, thinks he can take Portia away from me."

"Looks to me as if Harve wants to forget. Can't you forgive?"

"Not this year."

"How many years have you got left?" I asked him.

The telephone rang in another room. I heard a voice calling Portia's name. Stan glanced at me and we went to monitor her reaction. It was everything we could have wished for. She kept repeating, "Yes, Mr. Charpentier. Yes!"

When she put down the phone, a disturbed Lewicki said, "What was that all about?"

"It was Claude Charpentier calling from Paris. The famous director? He wants me to be in his new film. It's called *Helen of Troy*."

"Is this the face that lunched on fish and chips?" I asked Stan, "and burned the topless bars of Ilium?"

Lewicki's nose clicked a couple of positions out of joint. "That's terrific," he conceded. "When does he start filming?"

"He already has. He wants it finished in time for the Cannes Festival." She knelt beside him. "E.J., I need money for the plane and expenses. And I have to go in the morning."

"What about *Battleship Potemkin?*"

"No problem," Stan volunteered. "We have lots of Portia footage in the can. We can complete the film without her. Right, Darius?"

Calhoun looked relieved. "Sure. We can edit what we have."

Portia gave E.J. a kiss, then got to her feet. "I have to call about an early flight," she announced. "And then I have to get to bed."

Asher Malkov leaned into the frame. "No sense you getting up early, Mr. Lewicki, sir. If you give me the keys to the Rolls, I'll drive Portia to the airport."

"How about this sweetheart?" Lewicki said, flinging the keys to Asher. Then he flashed the hand-painted representation of downtown Montreal knotted about his neck. "And dig my birthday tie!"

As Asher left the room, I heard a muffled curse behind me on the

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veranda. I stared into the shadows and saw Harvey Lewicki, who appeared to have taken all he could swallow.

Stan and I accepted Darius's invitation to stay the night. It had started to rain and cabs would be hard to get. Besides, the Calhoun breakfasts were famous for technical merit and artistic impression.

I woke early, as I always do in a strange room, and went to the window. The rain had ceased. It was a champagne morning after what I considered a rubbing-alcohol night. The sound of drapes opening awoke my partner and he sat up in the other bed. "Guilty, your honor," he recited, "with explanation."

I was feeling a touch of con man's remorse. "We played a nasty trick on Portia," I said.

"Nonsense. She'll have a trip to Paris, all expenses paid. She won't find Charpentier but even if she does, O.K., there's been a misunderstanding. By the time she gets back the Potemkin saga will be far enough along so she can't do any harm."

"Still, she's such a beautiful, sexy, avaricious, unprincipled, greedy little girl, it seems a shame.—Hold it."

"What's happening?"

E. J. Lewicki had appeared downstairs in the courtyard carrying a package. He walked to the Rolls-Royce, got in, and switched on. He backed out and wheeled onto the steep road leading down the side of the mountain. At this early hour of six in the morning his was the only car in sight. I described the scene to Stan.

"What's he doing up at this time of day?" he said, coming and standing beside me. "I thought Malkov was using the Rolls to take Portia to the airport."

As we watched, the big car picked up speed. It careened around a narrow bend, scraping the curb, then went even faster. "Something's wrong," Stan said. We could see the driver pumping the brake without effect. Then the front door of the car opened and Lewicki came out, throwing himself clear. He went head over heels and was stopped short by a lamp standard that hit him with a body-block reminiscent of Sam Huff in his prime.

We threw on clothes and went running. In the hall, Asher Malkov was coming out of the bathroom. "Aren't you supposed to be driving the Rolls?" I yelled as we went by.

"Mr. Lewicki changed his mind. He took back the keys."

When he reached the bottom of the hill, I could hardly believe my eyes. The Rolls had piled into a stone wall and turned over. Not a

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lot of damage except for gas spilled on the pavement. And there was E. J. Lewicki staggering about at the back of the wreck, prepared to throw a lighted match on the ruptured fuel tank.

Before we could reach him, there was a muffled thump, flames engulfed the car, and our benefactor fell backward onto the road. We dragged him to a patch of grass. "How are you?" I asked.

"Not good. Banged up inside, I can tell."

"Don't move him any more," Stan said. "I'll call an ambulance." He ran away up the hill.

The old man closed his eyes. "You boys have given me a lot of fun," he whispered. "I was a weary old man till you sold me the bridge. And then that phony boxer. New lease on life—"

"Don't try to talk."

"Promise me you won't say I set fire to the car. I had to do it."

"Why?"

"Soon as I felt there was no brake, I knew it was Harvey." He bared his teeth in what could have been a grin. "Not a bad way for a man my age to go. Killed by his son in a fight over a woman."

I didn't have the heart to tell him about Harvey's vicious reaction last night when Malkov took the keys. Harvey believed Asher was going to be driving. His aim must have been to eliminate both the Israeli and the girl who had turned him down. "But why burn the car?"

"Police might check it out. Find Harvey tampered with the brakes. Bad for the family image. I'll say I was drunk. Lost control."

Portia was distressed when she heard about the accident but she left for the airport at eight anyway, with Asher Malkov driving Calhoun's car. I had a chance to ask him why Lewicki took back the keys to the Rolls.

"He said he was going to drive to Baytown and exchange the clock Harvey gave him."

That explained the package the old man was carrying. "But why so early in the morning?"

"I asked him that," Malkov said. "This is Wednesday. Mr. Lewicki told me the stores in Baytown close at noon on Wednesday."

It was all so plain and simple, there was only one explanation. E.J. had gone crazy—he was suffering from senile dementia. Those old arteries of his must be as crisp as uncooked macaroni. Such a mental state would explain his obsession with humiliating the son of whom he had once wanted to be proud . . .

He lingered for two days in an oxygen tent at Montreal General.

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The police accepted his explanation of the crash, so there was no investigation. He held on long enough to have a consultation with his lawyer, who came up from Baytown. Then he died.

"How do you like that?" Stan said. "I was expecting some final words."

Lewicki had his say in his Last Will and Testament, which the lawyer read to us the day after the cremation. We assembled in the library of Darius Calhoun's house. Stan and I did all right; there was provision for all costs to be met on the current film as well as a handsome fund set aside to back a sequel. We now had a guaranteed income for at least three years.

The main surprise was the elevation of Asher Malkov. He was left the big house south of Baytown and a substantial share of E.J.'s money. Portia Fleming did well too. Son Harvey came away with only the deed to a small apartment and an annual income of a few thousand.

On the veranda after the reading, Stan and I approached Harvey, who was sipping a beer. I took a chance in saying, "Count your blessings, Harv. The police might have checked the brakes on the Rolls-Royce."

"How do you know about that?"

"I spoke to your father right after it happened."

The pale-blue eyes filled with tears. "I thought Asher would be driving. I wanted to stop Portia from going to Paris. I expected they'd only be shaken up for a couple of weeks. I didn't think anybody could be killed on a small hill like that."

Malkov joined us, looking sober. He held out his hand to Harvey. "You have my sympathy."

Lewicki hesitated, then accepted the handshake. "You have my house and property," he said.

Malkov frowned. "I don't like that either. I think the accident made your father confused. He thought of me as a son but he forgot he already had one."

"That's how you see it?" Lewicki's tone was somewhere between sarcasm and disbelief.

"So I have asked the lawyer to do some more work. He is to transfer the house and land back to you. As for me, I will take fifty thousand dollars in cash."

The earth moved under Harvey's feet. "Incredible," he said.

"Yes, it is a lot of money. And I have this movie to finish and they

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say another one after it." Malkov smiled. "The life of Battleship Potemkin will go on—and it has become an interesting life."

The twist was too bizarre for any scenario Stan and I might have invented. In other words, it was real life. A restored Harvey Lewicki suggested a walk to the bar and as we went in that direction I heard Asher say, "Your father thought of me as a son. That makes us brothers."

Three days later, Stan invited me to his place for supper. The filming was going ahead minus the presence of our late sponsor and without the problem of getting Portia's body on film while keeping her voice off the sound track.

"Only one problem left," I said after the meal. "How do you survive Portia when she comes back from her false alarm in Paris?" We were sipping ale and watching television with the sound off, waiting for the Expos-Mets game to come on from the Olympic Stadium.

Stan looked complacent. "I'll give her a song and dance about her part in the sequel," he said. "She'll come around."

In the fifth inning at The Big 'O', with the Expos batting, two men on base and the Mets pitcher losing his stuff, the telephone rang. Stan cursed his way into the kitchen to answer it. He returned a few minutes later with "dear John" written all over his face.

"What happened?"

"That was Portia from Paris. She got there and looked up Claude Charpentier and of course he'd never heard of her." Stan sank onto his chair. "But by the time she'd told her story and they'd had breakfast together, the inspiration was upon him. He's going to do *Helen of Troy* and Portia is going to star."

"She'll never be able to say the lines."

"No problem. The production is in French. Her lines will be dubbed by an actress."

We were distracted by a roar from the television. The Expo batter had just hit into a double play and the side was retired.

"What else can go wrong?" Stan asked me.

The Expos put the Mets down in order, came to bat again, and promptly loaded the bases with nobody out. Then the television made a hissing noise, emitted a burning smell, and went black.

"Keep the change," I said.

The doorbell rang. Stan went away and returned with Asher Malkov carrying two fat suitcases. "Three guesses where this one is off to," my partner said.

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"Paris, Paris, and Paris."

"Portia told Claude Charpentier about me," Asher enthused. "He wants me to play Achilles."

Stan laid down the law. "But you're under contract to us." We could do without any more footage of Portia but the loss of Asher would destroy the project.

"Sorry to let you down, but this opportunity is once in a lifetime." The Israeli smiled shyly and hefted his luggage. "Mr. Charpentier said his lawyers will handle any beefs. Well. See you in court."

When Stan came back from ushering the last rat off the sinking ship, I said, "Any ideas?"

He sat down and picked up his glass. He frowned for a few thoughtful moments at the dead TV set. "E.J. Lewicki bequeathed us the cash to complete this movie and one more like it. We owe it to his memory to carry on."

"Without our male and female leads?"

"All it takes is ingenuity," Stan said. His eyes began to shine. "Call Darius Calhoun. Tell him to pack a hand-held camera, we're going to Paris. When the stars desert the production, the production must follow the stars."

It was totally mad. Charpentier would never let us film on his locations. We'd be busted by the French police. It would be impossible to fabricate a script to encompass these new conditions.

"Great idea," I said, heading for the phone. "I'll get right on it."

We were at the airport waiting for our Paris flight to be called, Stan and myself and Darius Calhoun. I was well into my course of preventive medicine. I've discovered that a massive dose of bourbon softens the knucklebones and keeps them from coming through the skin during takeoff.

Something was going on across the table. An official was arguing with my partner. Stan lost the argument and we ended up in an inside office minus our tickets and passports. "It's incredible," Darius said. "Imagine the Prime Minister being so concerned about our film that he telephoned security and had us stopped."

While Stan shrugged, I thought about the distinctive voice of Canada's leading politician—and something clicked. "Small question," I mumbled. "Did you by any chance forget to pay Yves Paquette for his latest impersonation?" Dark blood suffusing my partner's cheeks confirmed my suspicion.

"Well," I concluded, "it looks like Yves Paquette has just paid *us*."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 594th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, and we think you'll find it a memorable one, providing as it does the opportunity to meet the despicable Giles Riseborough. Yes, the Reader's Digest has its unforgettable characters and we have ours.

The author, J. M. Small, a Canadian, has written a 13-hour television series on health and also done a great deal of freelance legal writing and research. Splendid preparation for the writing of crime fiction, we venture to guess . . .

A FREE MAN

by J. M. SMALL

The jury has been out for fifteen minutes and my oafish guard has announced that he expects they will return within an hour. I must reluctantly bow to the man's greater experience in the workings of a jury trial, but I had rather expected no more than a token retirement to the chamber and a unanimous verdict of Not Guilty. The twelve men and women comprising my jury are hardly my peers but even their dull intellect cannot have been immune from the force of my argument, my wit, my command of the language, and my stirring closing address. No barrister in my wide and select acquaintance could have represented me better than I have represented myself.

And so while I await the return of the lowly dozen I shall set down the facts as I know them. History may benefit by the first-hand account of a man unjustly accused, ridiculed by an irresponsible press, incarcerated, tried, and eventually released a free man. Release and vindication will surely be the end-result of this attack on my impeccable character.

My name is Giles Riseborough. I am thirty years of age, single,

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uncommonly handsome, intelligent, witty, and the possessor of a substantial fortune. The details of my childhood and upbringing you know from the graphic accounts in the popular press. You have heard me described in glowing terms by my senile gin-pickled nanny, by former teachers, and by others whose opinions are more valuable. You know that I am a collector of beautiful objects—books, pictures, silver, and gems—and that I have certain idiosyncracies which have been quite cruelly misunderstood.

But you want facts and I shall give them to you. We shall go back to the evening of August 19th.

I was preparing to dine with four friends, and Danvers, my man, had again run my bath water too hot. In recent days he had made several such errors and I paused to have strong words with him. You may recall that during the early days of the trial the prosecutor vainly attempted to cast aspersions on my character by detailing the circumstances which culminated in my taking Danvers into my service and my treatment of that unfaithful retainer. Danvers, of course, is not the man's real name. It was Forrest or Bush or something equally unremarkable when he came to me, but his dark looks and rather sullen disposition demanded that I rechristen him Danvers in memorial to the magnificent Mrs. Danvers of *Rebecca* fame.

Danvers humbly applied for a position in my household some five years ago after the sudden demise of his former master. Again, much has been made of this fact. I played cards with Danvers' former master, a foolish man who bet too much, lost, and expected me to tear up his chit. When I refused, as any gentleman would, the fool resorted to the overly dramatic gesture of blowing his brains out. Fortunately, I was able to collect my winnings from his estate and, in the process, collected Danvers as well for a salary considerably less than he had formerly been paid.

I am digressing. To return to the night of August 19th, I chastised Danvers and retired to the comfort of my study to peruse a fine first edition of Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," which had unexpectedly been present in a box of books I had purchased at auction the day before. The volume, a slim leather-clad prize, had been all but concealed beneath a cardboard liner in the box and was in excellent condition save for evidence of a bookplate recently removed from the flyleaf.

I was puzzled to discover this book in the box but quite content to accept my good fortune. Danvers had been left at the auction house to place my bid, and apparently neither he nor any of the

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collectors present had noticed the book and my man had taken the box away with him in total ignorance. I therefore enjoyed this first opportunity to properly examine the volume, having spent the previous night with the wife of an absent friend.

Danvers entered with my cognac and announced in his sulky way that my evening clothes had been laid out. Had I not been pleased with the acquisition of the "Elegy" I might have been more harsh with him later when, on leaving my rooms, I discovered that a button was missing from the sleeve of my dinner jacket. The man turned quite pale and stammeringly suggested that he could soon find another and sew it on, but I brushed aside the churlish offer and strolled out into the balmy evening, confident that if noticed by my dinner companions the missing button would not be commented upon and would, rightly, be attributed to my servant's incompetence.

I was to dine at Il Buco, a simple Italian restaurant I had discovered deep within the purlieus of our famous city. My friends had assembled punctually at 8:30 and I arrived some twenty minutes later. The owner bustled to meet me, fawning as always and barely intelligible in his obsequious concern for my health and the weather's effect on me.

My companions were, as always, delighted to see me. They are agreeable men of differing backgrounds and I found their company amusing. Jack Tetley had been a year or two my senior at school and had gone into law. In his field he was highly thought of and had achieved a certain celebrity within his profession, and indeed in the uncritical eyes of the general public for his energetic defense of the criminal elements.

Medicine had beckoned Thomas Marshall, who, deprived of the patronage of a wealthy uncle, had slaved for five years in a depressing suburban hospital as a staff doctor before setting up a lucrative private practice with the encouragement—and, I suspect, financial assistance—of the other two members of our little dinner party.

Nick Margetis was, like myself, a gentleman of independent means. He seemed to devote his hours to the acquisition of exquisite works of art and the lending of them to public galleries—anonymously! The remaining chair at the table was occupied by the only man present who could be described as being "in trade." Leonard Bates was a dealer in oriental porcelains of great rarity and beauty and was the proud possessor of a comely daughter of nineteen years.

My arrival interrupted yet another retelling of the meeting of Dr. Tom Marshall by Margetis and Bates. The two, rather the worse for

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drink, had been involved in a motor-vehicle accident and the intervention of the then staff doctor at the hospital had saved Margetis from a charge of impaired driving. Marshall had refused to allow the police officers to take the blood test which would surely have shown an alcohol level well above that allowed by the drudges of bureaucracy. While they all seemed amused by this tale, I found it tiresome and quickly moved them to the selection of wine and food.

The evening was pleasant enough, the food excellent, and my companions in particularly high spirits. Nick admitted to the purchase of a handsome dish of the Sung dynasty from Leonard and I chided them both with my doubts as to its antiquity. I was mildly annoyed with Leonard who had shown me the same dish some weeks before and to whom I had expressed an interest in purchasing the piece. I refrained from mentioning the "Elegy", not wishing to kindle jealousy.

Jack recounted in rather tedious detail the course of a trial for attempted murder he had just concluded in another city. It was much the same as I had heard the night before from his good wife after his untimely telephone call to her while he waited for the jury to return. And Leonard, of course, extolled the accomplishments of his lovely daughter in her second year of university, which information I was already privy to first hand. The man was wholly ignorant of the fair student's other accomplishments.

Il Buco's other habitués had long ago left when I bade my fellows a good evening at 1:00 A.M., leaving them to their brandy while I returned to the comfort of my rooms and enjoyed the sleep of the innocent.

Nine in the morning was an inexcusable hour for Danvers to waken me, but there he was opening the curtains to the accursed sun and begging my pardon. I flung my bedside water-jug at him but still he persisted and had the audacity to interrupt my string of invectives to announce that the police were at the door with a warrant. I regret that my ignoble incarceration has prevented me from firing the man.

I have an eccentricity I have carefully fostered for many years—no one is invited to my rooms. I give dinner parties in restaurants, I do business at my club. This eccentricity is widely known and therefore allows me to invite, when I choose, certain ladies to my home.

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This little ruse of mine has since been grossly misinterpreted and used against me in a shocking manner.

You may think I am digressing again, avoiding a certain unpleasantness.

All right—I shall digress no longer.

Danvers' announcement did not cause me alarm. It was some error on the part of officialdom, no doubt, easily dealt with by Jack Tetley if need be. Ignoring the hovering and anxious Danvers, I dressed in a leisurely fashion and at length went to the hall to find two poorly tailored "gentlemen" of the constabulary who presented me with a warrant, replete with circular coffee stain, purporting to allow them to search my rooms! I instructed Danvers to get my good friend Judge Harmon on the telephone.

After summoning two uniformed minions from the doorstep, the policemen began their audacious search.

Danvers brought me my breakfast in the dining room, where I tried to ignore the clump of the heavy and doubtless dirty boots tracking about the oriental carpets in my rooms.

They took a great deal of time. I had just finished breakfast, coffee, and a Turkish cigarette when the man obviously in charge appeared to charge me with burglary, theft, and possession of stolen property! His flat-footed assistant stood in the doorway with a quantity of my personal possessions in his arms—my evening clothes, my Gray's "Elegy", a small leather case I did not recognize, and a number of labeled bags and boxes. I decided this must be some sort of macabre joke perpetrated by my friends in the legal community and submitted with as much good humor as possible to what is called frisking and allowed myself to be led to a marked patrol car waiting at the curb.

In restrospect, I am thankful for the excellent breakfast prepared by Danvers that August morning as I have not enjoyed a good meal for the last 179 days. The guards are obviously overpaid as they will not even consider a liberal financial donation in return for a bottle of decent cognac or a piece of properly cooked veal. What has happened to free enterprise?

Ah, but dear reader, you are hungry for facts. I am accused of stealing the Gray's "Elegy" from Jack Tetley while "visiting" his wife on the night of August 18th. He had owned the book for three years, having purchased it from a reputable dealer in this city. The steamed-off bookplate was found at the bottom of the wastebasket in my study. The Sung dish purchased, apparently, by Nick Margetis

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from Leonard Bates had been stolen, along with a pretty Turner watercolor, early in the morning of August 20th in a break-in of his home. Bits of glass were found in the cuffs of my evening trousers which matched the antique etched glass of the broken window. And a button, identical to that missing from my dinner jacket, was found in the house. Need I say that the Sung dish was found in the vitrine in my study? And the Turner in a drawer in the drawing room?

There were other things as well—a pair of Nineteenth Century duelling pistols, some magnificent Georgian silver knives, a jeweled Fabergé cigarette case, and more. Each item had been missing or stolen from its owner within the last two years, most within the preceding six months. All of the owners were friends of mine.

At the trial Danvers insisted that I had not returned to my rooms until after 3:00 A.M. on August 20th and that the button had been firmly in place on my sleeve when I left for dinner.

Judge Harmon claimed he could do nothing to assist me. I shall certainly strike him from my list of dinner guests in the future. Jack Tetley refused to act for me due to some conflict of interest he claimed existed in relation to my having the "Elegy".

The popular press has not been kind and has adopted the sobriquet "The Gentleman Bandit" to describe me. I intend to sue the newspapers when I am released. The barristers I consulted are a scurrilous lot; every man of them informed me that in the face of the evidence I should enter a plea of guilty. I am *not* guilty and am confident, after having conducted my own defense, that even this dull jury will have seen reason.

Reason, after all, is what they must see. I have told them to ignore the incidentals which the prosecution calls evidence and consider instead how *un*reasonable it is to suppose that a man of my breeding and intelligence could have even contemplated the deeds attributed to me. I have also considered, in the privacy of my barren cell, what chain of fate or circumstance brought me before this archaic court.

The solution I have arrived at is fantastic, unbelievable—and the only one that seems possible. Danvers, obviously, was a major player. But his motivation for wishing to do me harm is obscure, unless he nursed some low grudge against me concerning his former master. But even if that is the case, he could not have acted alone. That conclusion leads me to consider my old friends, Tetley, Marshall, Margetis, and Bates. Tetley, away so often, cannot have resented my dalliance with his wife. Can he? Bates is a man of the world and

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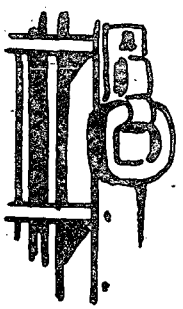
as such would not object to his daughter's infatuation with a man of my sterling qualities. Would he? And if Dr. Marshall had to struggle for a few years, it undoubtedly built his character and he could well do without any financial intervention from me. Do you not agree?

No, the solution is too fantastic! Each of these men would have had to hold a strong dislike for me and how could that be possible? And yet my knowledge of detective fiction shows how the deeds could be done, each man supplying some valuable object to be secreted in my rooms by Danvers. Margetis breaking his own window before going to dinner that balmy August night and taking with him, in an envelope perhaps, some slivers of the distinctive glass. While I slept innocently in the comfort of my bedroom, Danvers could have met surreptitiously with Margetis and exchanged an envelope of glass slivers for an incriminating button to be placed amid the debris at Margetis' home.

But wait! My guard has roused himself from his sleeping position against the wall to announce the return of the twelve. Now is not the time for fruitless conjecture—my vindication is at hand.

Four men sat at a table late that February night, waiting. The arrival of the fifth man sent a gust of chill air swirling through the room to flicker the dim candlelight illuminating each anxious face. He sat at the table, tired, strained, yet somehow exultant, and gratefully drained the glass of cognac placed before him. A satisfied smile spread across his face. "He got ten years" said Forrest, who would never be called Danvers again.



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a *NEW* Inspector Dover story by

JOYCE PORTER

The victim, his aunt Miss Wainwright told Dover, was a greedy little brute, an ill-mannered, vicious young savage who couldn't hold his drink. Dover was by then on his second whiskey. No wonder by the end of his afternoon of interrogations he was having a bit of trouble seeing the forest . . .

DOVER SEES THE TREES

by JOYCE PORTER

Whoever murdered Randall Wainwright, the young man from Australia, must have jumped for joy on finding that Detective Chief Inspector Dover had been assigned to the case. Not that the general public knew much about Dover—considerable efforts were made to keep him out of the limelight—but anybody smart enough to commit murder which warranted the intervention of Scotland Yard would have no difficulty in spotting a real old dud like Dover a mile off.

It was three o'clock on a fine Saturday afternoon when he arrived at The Greensward Motel and he was already whining on all six cyclinders. Why was it, he demanded of Detective Sergeant MacGregor, his long-suffering assistant, that everybody else could be out enjoying themselves while he, Dover, was condemned to spend the whole bloody day poring over a smelly corpse.

"I mean," he said, and had been saying every thirty seconds for some considerable time, "who cares? They're all descended from bloody convicts."

Sergeant MacGregor was an uncomfortably scrupulous policeman and would never have dreamt of sweeping any crime under the

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carpet just because it was less trouble that way. "Randall Wainwright was a rather unusual Australian, sir."

"Aren't they all, laddie? I tell you, I've seen some that'd look better up a bloody tree in a safari park."

"This one happens to have been the sole heir to the Wainwright millions, sir."

Dover was unimpressed. "The Wainwright millions?"

"The big chain of furniture shops, sir, that Sir Sydney Wainwright built up from nothing. When he dies, this lad who's been killed was down to cop the lot."

Dover perked up. "Piece of cake then," he declared confidently. "Collar whoever comes in for the lolly now, and Bob's your uncle. 'Strewth, you'd have thought the local wallies could have worked that out for themselves."

The management of The Greensward Motel, their booking arrangements already shot to hell by *someone's* total lack of consideration, had begrudgingly allocated a large double room to the police for use as headquarters. By the time Dover and MacGregor put in an appearance, the transformation was practically complete. Beds and color-television sets had been moved out and typewriters and filing cabinets moved in. There were telephones everywhere, all ringing, and the room buzzed with keen young coppers, all intent on exploiting what might be the chance of a lifetime.

Dover came over quite faint, but his instinct for finding havens of peace and quiet in the most unfavorable circumstances stood him in good stead. Shoving MacGregor ahead of him, he withdrew nimbly into the private bathroom and locked the door.

The trouble with even the most well appointed bathrooms is that there isn't really anywhere very comfortable to sit. Dover subsided morosely on the best that was available and MacGregor balanced himself gingerly on a tiny three-legged stool.

" 'Strewth," groaned Dover. "What a bloody life, eh?"

"Perhaps I could go on with telling you what the local police have found out so far, sir," said MacGregor, meanly taking what advantage he could of the situation. "Randall Wainwright was killed early this morning. He was stabbed once through the chest with a World War Two German bayonet while lying in bed. The blade went straight through his heart and the police surgeon reckons death would have been instantaneous. The victim was stabbed through the bedclothes so it's unlikely that the murderer would have got any bloodstains on him. The German bayonet—that's the murder

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weapon, sir—was the property of the deceased. He'd apparently bought it as a souvenir in Norway, of all places. It's brand-new and was never issued for use."

Dover blew most unpleasantly down his nose. "Fingerprints?"

"The bayonet had been wiped clean, sir, and there's nothing very promising in the rest of the room."

"You never see a decent fingerprint these days," grumbled Dover. "It's all those bloody detective stories." He tipped his bowler hat even lower over his eyes and sank a couple of inches deeper into the greasy collar of his overcoat. "How old was he?"

MacGregor consulted his notebook. "Nineteen, sir. He only arrived in England yesterday morning. He'd been doing a sort of world tour by motorbike. Hence, I suppose, the bayonet from Norway."

There were two small wrapped bars of soap on the washbasin. Dover put them away in his pocket and looked speculatively at the piles of towels on the towel rail. "Where does a half baked young punk on a motorbike get the money for a place like this?"

MacGregor made a silent vow to defend those towels to the death. Dover's contention that everything not actually nailed down was fair game had led to enough embarrassment on previous occasions. "The young man was staying here as the guest of his grandfather, sir. That's the one who was going to leave him all his money."

Dover had found some strips of paper specially impregnated for cleaning shoes. They went into his pocket too. MacGregor wondered why. To the best of his knowledge, the Dover boots hadn't had so much as a duster near them since the day Dover had "liberated" them from the Yard's Lost Property Department.

Dover let his butterfly mind flit back to the case in hand. "Any sign of a break-in?"

"Not according to the local police, sir, but I think we ought perhaps to go along and have a look for ourselves."

"Wait till they've moved the body," grunted Dover. "Some of those stiffs'd put you off your grub for a week."

"We can't sit here all day, sir."

The lavatory seat must have been harder than it looked because Dover didn't usually plump for the work alternative. "We'll go and interview somebody."

MacGregor was on his feet in a flash. "Who did you have in mind, sir?"

"The popsie. Or the boy friend. Whichever."

"Sir?"

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"Use your brains, laddie," exhorted Dover irritably. "If there's no break-in, that means What'shisname must have opened the door to the murderer himself. Would you open your bedroom door to a total stranger in the middle of the bloody night?"

"But, sir—" MacGregor was well aware of the hazards of letting dubious hypotheses like this take root in Dover's well-manured brain "—the position of the body indicates that Wainwright was most likely fast—"

"Stuff the position of the body!" snarled Dover. "You just get your skates on, laddie, and fix something up. I'll be with you in a minute."

But when, after a good bit longer than a minute, Dover emerged from the bathroom amidst a hammering of pipes and the roaring of waters, he found that things had been taken out of his hands. Sydney Wainwright—furniture maker, millionaire, grandfather of the deceased, and fellow clubman of the Metropolitan Commissioner of Police—had expressed a desire to meet the two Scotland Yard detectives before they began their investigations.

Dover went like a lamb.

"Oh, that's too bad!" protested old Mr. Wainwright, raising himself bravely up from his pillows. "I could perfectly well have got up and come to you." Since his room was only just across the corridor, his concern for the inconvenience he was causing seemed a little excessive.

"Now, Father," warned the middle-aged woman who had ushered Dover and MacGregor in, "you know what the doctor said."

"He was as big a fussy old woman as you!"

The woman smiled apologetically at Dover. "I'm Miss Wainwright, by the way. I'm afraid Father's a little on the fractious side this morning. He's not used to being kept in bed. He's usually so active. Of course, it's been a big shock for him. For all of us, really."

"All of you?" echoed Dover as he settled himself down in the most comfortable armchair. His eagle eye had already caught sight of an impressive array of bottles of drink on the windowsill and he was prepared to be cooperative.

Mr. Wainwright was used to doing the talking. "My birthday party," he explained. "I've been celebrating it here at The Greensward ever since my wife died. Trying to cater at home for a large family get-together is simply too difficult these days. Especially as Cora—" he flapped a hand in his daughter's direction "—is a some-

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what indifferent housekeeper. So I bring everybody here. This year," he added with a sigh, "was to have been rather special."

"It's Father's seventieth birthday," said Miss Wainwright.

"Mind your own business, Cora, and give these gentlemen an aperitif! It's not too early for you, is it, Chief Inspector?"

The hour had not yet struck when it was too early for Dover to accept free liquid refreshment, from whatever source, and he smilingly indicated that a large whisky might just hit the spot. MacGregor, on the other hand, refused, muttering something shamefaced about not drinking while on duty or in the middle of the afternoon.

"Actually," Mr. Wainwright went on, sipping a medicinal cognac, "when I said that this year was to have been rather special, I was really meaning it was to be my first meeting with my grandson, Randy. Poor boy! I can still hardly believe it." He bowed his head. "What a terrible waste!"

"Father, don't upset yourself." Miss Wainwright's admonition was little more than a reflex action.

Mr. Wainwright scowled at her. "Randy was my heir, Chief Inspector. You'll find that information of vital importance in your investigation. Mine is a one-man business, you see—always has been and always will be. I don't believe in this 'control by committee' nonsense. Whoever takes over when I'm gone is going to get the lot. The whole damned works. The rest of my family have nothing to complain about. They've got their allowances, they won't starve. In any case, Randy was the only son of my eldest son. It's not unnatural for me to nominate him as my successor. I didn't do it without considerable thought. Now all my plans and hopes have been wiped out by one savage, jealous blow."

Miss Wainwright had perched herself on the edge of the spare bed and taken up her knitting. "You'll have to choose a new heir now, Father."

"Don't you tell me what I've got to do!" came the response viciously. "Just you tell me what's the point in choosing somebody else if you and the rest of the family are going to kill him too."

Dover blinked. "You mean somebody in your family knocked this lad off?"

"Any fool can see that! The boy only arrived at Dover yesterday afternoon and he came straight here on his motorbike. The only people he had time to meet were the family. Who else could have killed him? It isn't as though there's any lack of motive. I've got a

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son and two daughters and three grandchildren—all bright green with envy and all nagging at me night and day to change my will and leave everything to them. They make my life a misery with their bloody sniveling."

Miss Wainwright looked up from her knitting and addressed herself to Dover. "You can hardly blame us for thinking it was unfair. My father had never seen this boy. None of us had. He was a complete stranger. My brother Jack—he was Randy's father—ran away from home when he was sixteen because he was so miserable. He hated Father. And Father hated him."

"I *didn't* hate Jack! He was the only one of the lot of you with an ounce of spirit or drive. All right, we didn't always see eye to eye, but the lad had backbone and I respected him for it. And Randy was the same." Mr. Wainwright broke off as the empty glass Dover was waving hopefully in the air finally caught his eye. "And why don't you give the Chief Inspector another drink?"

"Just to help settle my stomach," leered Dover as he watched the amber liquid gurgle into his glass. "It's been playing me up something cruel all day. You'd think the medical profession could pinpoint what's wrong, but it's got them baffled. It starts off with this sort of stabbing pain and—"

Mr. Wainwright cut callously through his tale of visceral woe. "I want my grandson's murderer found, Chief Inspector. And punished. You can rely on my full cooperation and on that of my family, even though one of them undoubtedly killed the poor boy." He straightened out his top sheet with a firm hand. "I don't anticipate much difficulty. Not with your professional expertise and my unrivaled knowledge of the characters of those under suspicion."

"My pleasure," said Dover with the smirk of a practised bootlicker. He generally tended to take violent exception when outsiders tried to muscle in on the act, but Mr. Wainwright was clearly something different. His generous attitude towards alcohol, if nothing else, entitled him to special consideration. "Mind if I smoke?" asked Dover, snapping his fingers flabbily at MacGregor, who reckoned that keeping Dover in cigarettes was what was keeping him poor.

Mr. Wainwright, however, was a pearl among men. "Have a cigar," he said.

With a glass of whisky in his hand and a fat Havana in his mouth, Dover was like a pig in muck. He sat back to enjoy the good life while it lasted and let MacGregor get on with the business of assembling a few basic facts.

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These, it soon transpired, weren't either very complicated or very interesting.

Randy had been the last of the birthday guests to arrive at the motel, roaring up on his motorbike only a short time before everybody was due to forgather in Mr. Wainwright's room for a predinner drink.

"Cheaper than going to the bar," said Mr. Wainwright.

Randy had appeared at the party still wearing his leather gear and big boots. He was full of his travels across Europe and very proud of the souvenirs he'd collected.

"He insisted on showing us everything," said Miss Wainwright disdainfully. "You've never seen such rubbish."

Including the German bayonet?

Miss Wainwright shuddered. "He kept trying to spear the cocktail onions with it. Quite the life and soul of the party!"

"The boy felt uncomfortable," protested Mr. Wainwright. "Hardly surprising with you lot looking him up and down as though he'd come from Mars."

"And this was the first time any of you had seen him?" asked MacGregor, pencil poised importantly over his notebook.

"The very first time," agreed Miss Wainwright with an enigmatic little sigh. "It was not the most enjoyable of occasions. And when we moved into the dining room it got worse."

"Only because you were all determined to dislike the boy and find fault with him!"

"He was an ill-mannered, vicious young savage, Father, who couldn't hold his drink. You just don't want to admit that you made a mistake. Fancy that greedy little brute taking over Wainwright's!"

"Pour the Chief Inspector out another drink!" yelped Mr. Wainwright. "And if you can't speak well of the dead hold your damned tongue!"

Miss Wainwright relieved Dover of his empty glass and fired a parting shot before heading for the whisky bottle. "I'm only surprised it wasn't you we found murdered in your bed this morning, Father."

"Cow!" snarled Mr. Wainwright.

Dover, who was beginning to view the passing scene through an amber-colored haze, never did quite fathom why they then proceeded to interview the entire Wainwright clan in old Mr. Wainwright's bedroom. MacGregor knew how it had happened and had protested about it, but he'd got nowhere in the face of Mr. Wainwright's grim

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determination and Dover's flaccid inertia. With breaks only for more whiskey, afternoon tea, and several trips to Mr. Wainwright's bathroom on Dover's part—during which he acquired a box of tissues and whole clutch of paper squares for blotting lipstick and wiping razors—the interrogations went on for some hours. Mr. Wainwright determined the order in which the members of his family appeared, and even sent his daughter, Cora, to summon them. First, though, she had to complete her own evidence.

Knitting indefatigably away, she described the family dinner party at which young Randy, growing more objectionable by the minute, had chewed with his mouth open, talked with his mouth full, and swilled down the vintage claret as though it was so much Coca-Cola. She had been delighted when, about half past nine, her father announced that he was going to bed and the party broke up.

"He was as disgusted and fed up as the rest of us," said Miss Wainwright, "though he pretended not to be. I came back here with him and got him settled for the night. Then I went to my own room—I'm sharing with my niece, Priscilla. I got undressed and watched some rubbish on the television until she came in about midnight. Then I made a cup of tea for both of us and we went to bed. I'm a very light sleeper—I have to be with Father to look after—and I would certainly have heard if Priscilla had got up during the night. She didn't, and we both slept through till eight o'clock this morning."

"Which," Mr. Wainwright pointed out maliciously in case the men from Scotland Yard had missed it, "doesn't prove that Cora herself didn't wield the fatal bayonet, because young Priscilla is capable of sleeping through the Last Trump. And don't let Cora's fragile appearance deceive you—there are some pretty powerful muscles under that mohair jumper."

"Mostly developed in your service, Father," commented Miss Wainwright sourly. "But why on earth should I kill Randall? You're hardly likely to leave the Wainwright empire to me, are you?"

"Not unless and until complete senility sets in," agreed her father. "Still, where there's life, there's hope. Any questions, gentlemen?

"Who actually found the body?" asked MacGregor.

"The chambermaid. She wanted to clean the room." Mr. Wainwright nodded at his daughter. "All right, Cora, fetch Rose and Malcolm in!"

Rose Turner was Mr. Wainwright's younger daughter, and though it might seem slightly irregular to interview her and her husband

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at the same time Mr. Wainwright didn't seem unduly worried about it. Indeed he was soon demonstrating that he could cope with Turners at platoon strength should the need arise.

He kicked off by filling in the background. "In case Rose's pathetic attempts to look seventeen have confused you, Chief Inspector, she's thirty-six. Her husband has reached his peak as the deputy personnel manager in a small engineering works—which doesn't stop him thinking he could run my business if he got the chance. Malcolm is a very simple-minded man and killing off the current heir to the throne would be just about his mark. Rose, on the other hand, would favor a more subtle approach to the problem. Her first instinct would be to marry off her daughter, the sound-sleeping Priscilla, to Randy and get their hands on the money that way. However, I doubt if Randy was fool enough to be seduced by young Priscilla's limited charms. Rose may have realized this even as early as last night and so resorted—reluctantly, I'm sure—to murder."

"Father!" wailed Rose Turner.

"There is, you see," continued Mr. Wainwright, his withers quite unwrung, "another Turner. Young Piers. A ridiculous name, but I refused to have that brat called after me. Rose has tried on many occasions to get me to make this undistinguished youth my heir. Now, with Randy dead, Piers has the distinction of being my sole remaining grandson. You must make what you will of that, Chief Inspector. As to alibis, no doubt Rose and Malcolm will both claim to vouch for each other."

They did, and were dismissed.

It was at this point that afternoon tea was served. Dover was the only one who appeared to have much of an appetite and he was so busy stuffing his face that most of the examination of Joan Wainwright—wife of Mr. Wainwright's younger son, Alex—and her daughter passed clean over his dandruff-flecked head. This was a pity because Mr. Wainwright managed to elicit a new motive for Randy's murder—sex.

"Oh, don't be so daft, Grandfather," Leonie Wainwright said.

"You can't deny he was making overtures to you."

"He'd asked me to go to bed with him before we'd finished the soup," said Leonie calmly and to her mother's visible dismay. "So what?"

Mr. Wainwright eyed her accusingly. "Randy wasn't the sort of lad to take no for an answer. By George, I wouldn't have at his age."

"I'll bet you wouldn't, you old lecher!" Leonie laughed delightedly.

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"And you're quite right, of course. Actually, he got much more masterful afterwards when you'd all gone off to bed or whatever. We went down to the discotheque in the cellar."

"Who's we?" asked MacGregor, snatching eagerly at the chance to prove he was still there.

Leonie ran a speculative eye over the handsome young sergeant. "Piers, Priscilla, Randy, and me."

"And what happened?"

Leonie shrugged indifferently. "Randy got a bit much. Talk about king stags in the rut! I thought one time he was really going to have me right out there in the middle of the floor."

"Oh, Leonie!" moaned her mother.

With the crass insouciance of youth, Leonie leaned across and helped herself to one of Dover's sandwiches. She was lucky not to be charged with murder there and then.

It was all crystal-clear to Mr. Wainwright. "So later on he lured you into his room and you were obliged to defend your honor. Well, you've nothing to worry about, Leonie. The courts are always pretty lenient with such cases. The most you'll get is probation."

Leonie swallowed her sandwich and giggled. "You're *sweet*, Grandpop."

Mr. Wainwright turned to his daughter-in-law. "What did you think about it, Joan?"

"Me? Think about what?"

"About Randy raping your daughter, of course."

"Oh, *Father!*"

"Don't tell me you didn't notice he was trying to get his leg over."

Joan Wainwright tried not to wince at the expression. "I knew Leonie could handle him."

"Well, she's certainly experienced enough, from what I hear." Mr. Wainwright managed to catch Dover's rolling eye. "They could both have been in it together, mother and daughter."

"Ah," said Dover wisely, and belched.

"They were sharing a room, you know. Easy enough to wait till everything's quiet and then slip out and down the corridor. The whole thing wouldn't take more than a minute or two. They knew he'd got that damned bayonet, and who better than Leonie to get him to open his door in the middle of the night?"

"Just what I was thinking," agreed Dover thickly.

The worm, however, suddenly turned. Joan Wainwright rose to her feet and glared down at her father-in-law. "You're nothing but

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an evil-minded old troublemaker!" she sobbed. "Everybody knows you wouldn't leave us your rotten money if we were the last people on earth. You've never forgiven Alex for turning his back on your precious furniture business. So, since you can't accuse us of killing your precious grandson for money, you've dreamed up this absurd story. You know your trouble, Father? You're sick! Just because Alex couldn't come to your lousy birthday party this year! I knew you'd try and take it out on Leonie and me!" She turned to her daughter. "Come on, Leonie! Don't just sit there! We're going!"

When Dover returned from yet another sortie to the bathroom, he found to his dismay that there was now another member of the Wainwright clan sitting awaiting his ordeal. 'Strewth, how many more of 'em? He hoped that this beardless youth with the supercilious sneer and the SOD 'EM ALL! T-shirt was the bloody last.

Piers Turner was the son of Rose and Malcolm and, since about three o'clock that morning, Mr. Wainwright's sole remaining grandson. Not that the honor was humbling him in any way.

"Who cares?" he inquired scornfully of the room at large. "All property is theft and what difference does one cruddy Australian tick more or less make to the real problems of the world? Instead of sitting around here contemplating our navels we ought to be out doing something about whales and rain forests and mineral fuels."

Neither Dover nor Mr. Wainwright cared much for being lectured on their social responsibilities by a spotty fifteen-year-old.

Dover fell back on his usual tactics. "You hated him, didn't you?" he demanded fiercely.

Piers Turner smiled. "I save my hatred for more worthy targets, Chief Inspector. Where Randy was concerned, my main feeling was one of profound relief that I didn't have to share a bedroom with the loudmouth punk." He transferred his smile to Mr. Wainwright. "You must be slipping, Grandpa. You generally insist on double rooms all around, unless it involves a really unholy coupling. I'll say that for you—you do observe the bourgeois decencies most meticulously."

Piers Turner was in the process of making a formal declaration to the effect that he had not murdered Randy Wainwright during the course of the previous night when the telephone rang. Mr. Wainwright was nearer but MacGregor was quicker and grimly determined not to have any more of his prerogatives usurped.

It was the local police who had been trying to track down their colleagues from the Yard for some time. MacGregor was in no mood

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for explanations. "Well, you've found us now," he barked, "what do you want?"

The telephone squawked excitedly and Dover eased himself back in his chair in order to give his paunch the maximum possible lebensraum.

"Of course we want you to follow it up!" snapped MacGregor, who had been quite patient and understanding before he got teamed up with Dover. "Need you ask? This is a bloody murder case!" He dropped the receiver back with a bang.

"Has something happened?"

The eager question had come from Mr. Wainwright, but MacGregor did his best to preserve good order and discipline by directing his answer to Dover. "That was one of the local inspectors, sir. They've been checking through the list of guests staying in the motel last night. They've found a couple of Australians—youngish men. They had a room on this corridor and they left very early this morning. The girl on Reception remembers them. Tough-looking types, and they turned up asking for a room *after* Randy Wainwright had booked in."

"Sounds promising," grunted Dover.

There was a little flurry of activity. MacGregor bustled off importantly to teach the local police how to do their job, young Piers Turner was dismissed with his principles still untarnished, and even Cora Wainwright was let off the leash for a few minutes in the fresh air before resuming her thankless task of ministering to her father.

Dover and Mr. Wainwright were left alone together.

"Do you think it could have been these Australians?" Wainwright asked.

Reluctantly Dover roused himself. He sort of felt he owed old Wainwright something. "Gangsters," he grunted. "Followed the lad all the way from Australia, I shouldn't wonder. God only knows what he might have been up to out there—Mafia, drugs, diamond smuggling."

"Would they know about the bayonet?"

Dover puffed out his cheeks. "They might have seen it when you were having dinner. Or they might have just improvised. I dunno."

Mr. Wainwright frowned. "So you don't think one of the family killed him?"

Dover shook his head and a few flakes of dandruff floated gently

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onto the shoulders of his overcoat. "It was all so bloody quick," he grumbled. "The lad had hardly got here before he was knocked off. Besides, where's the motive?"

"The motive," said Mr. Wainwright with excusable exasperation, "is my money! I told you—Randy was due to get the lot—sole control of my entire business! The rest of them will just go on getting the allowances I pay them now, and that's all!"

Strangely enough, Dover had taken in more of the afternoon's proceedings than one might have imagined. The slack mouth, the closed eyes, even the occasional snore apparently didn't imply total oblivion. "There'd be a motive," he agreed, "if you were going to make one of 'em your new heir. But you're not, are you? I reckon you'd sooner leave it all to a bloody cats home."

Mr. Wainwright grinned. Old Fatso wasn't quite as thick as he looked. "What are you going to do now?"

Not a lot, actually. However, seeing that Mr. Wainwright had lost a grandson, even Dover expressed it more diplomatically. "Oh, we'll keep soldiering on," he promised stoutly. "Never close the file on an unsolved murder, you know. Still, I doubt if we'll get very far. There aren't any clues, you see. Now if we could find somebody who saw somebody going into What'shisname's room at the relevant time, that'd be different."

"Could you not follow up this business of the key?"

Dover sagged. "What key?"

"Randy's room wasn't broken into, so the killer must have had a key."

"The lad most likely opened the door himself."

Mr. Wainwright hadn't become a millionaire through bearing fools gladly. "Randy was stabbed through the bedclothes," he pointed out sharply. "Surely that indicates he was asleep when it happened?"

Dover clutched groggily at what straws were left to him. "We'll have to wait for the postmortem."

"But you could start making inquiries about the possible whereabouts of a duplicate key, couldn't you?"

Was there any wonder Dover's stomach kept playing up? "Waste of time," he said desperately. "This murderer's too cunning to leave a trail like that."

Mr. Wainwright drew in a deep breath and restrained his natural desire to leap out of bed and shake some sense into this idiot. Still, it was getting unbearably frustrating. "I told you," he said, trying to keep it casual, "that I've been holding my birthday party at this

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motel since my wife died. In the early days I used to invite the odd friend as well as the family. A lady friend. I might have found a master key rather useful."

Dover gazed longingly at the bottles which still lined the windowsill and wondered if it was worth the effort to jolly old Wainwright along. "I expect you would. Might be easier said than done, though, to get hold of one."

"I could have bribed a chambermaid," Mr. Wainwright snarled. "Borrowed her master key for half an hour and got it copied at the shop around the corner. And I might have hung onto the duplicate as a souvenir."

"Ah," said Dover.

"Have you ever thought, Chief Inspector, what it would be like to be a rich man, surrounded by a mob of greedy offspring who don't give a damn for you personally but just want your money?"

No, Dover hadn't.

"Well, I can tell you, it can be bloody frightening. You're a sitting duck either way. If you don't make a will, then it's equal shares all round. If you do make one, you can feel the chief beneficiary's finger itching on the trigger every minute of every live-long day."

"Nasty," said Dover, trying to sound sympathetic and look thirsty.

"You never feel safe. Not unless you've left your money to somebody thousands of miles away. As long as your heir is safely on the other side of the world, you can rest easy. And everybody else is intent on keeping you alive. It's their only chance of getting a will made in their favor."

Dover was rapidly coming to the conclusion that mental telepathy was a load of old codswallop.

"But supposing," Mr. Wainwright went mercilessly on, "you learn that your heir is about to turn up on your doorstep? A sensible man would start taking a few precautions, wouldn't he? Fix things up so that there was no shortage of suspects. Think about a weapon. Make sure there's going to be a suitable opportunity. Stop behaving as though you're as fit as a fiddle and twice as active as men half your age. Make plans, but stay flexible. Of course—" Mr. Wainwright treated himself to a death's-head grin "—all this may turn out to be a wholly decent young man who wouldn't hurt a fly, much less his benefactor. On the other hand, he might turn out to be a right ruthless little bastard, merciless and very quick."

Dover's stomach was rumbling most alarmingly. "You could al-

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ways change your will," he said. "Cut the beggar off with a shilling if you didn't like the look of him."

Mr. Wainwright denied himself the luxury of pointing out that it wasn't easy to get hold of your solicitor over the weekend. He'd already said enough. It was one thing to want somebody to appreciate your cleverness but quite another to face spending your declining years behind bars. He let his voice assume an old man's quaver. "But I'm boring you, Chief Inspector. How about you and me having another little drink, just to cheer ourselves up, eh?" He waved his hand feebly. "I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to pour it out."

Dover's face broke into a sunny beam. "My pleasure!" he said.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

WANTED: ONE VILLAIN

by LOLA STRONG JANES

I sat down to write out a mystery story,
Something perplexing and suitably gory,
Poison or knives or perhaps a revolver—
Sprinkled with clues just to help out the solver.
But I found that I just couldn't shoot, stab, or pill one—
I loved all my characters too much to kill one.
So now I am searching for so foul a villain
That I'll have the nerve to get on with the killin'.

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a *NEW* short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

Barring Dot Enster, public-relations girl for the Royal Palace Hotel, who was a pain in his sense of dignity, nobody would get too fussed if Wally Martel upped and vanished.

A new look at the age-old battle of the sexes. Or should we say the old-age battle of the sexes? . . .

A HARD MAN TO SURPRISE

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Wally Martel, who preferred to be called Wallace in his professional moments, hurried to reach the dim lighting of the Royal Caribbean Palace's foyer. He'd pressed the pants of his last good suit—Ethel Landseer, Rome, '74—under his mattress. And had just discovered that along with faultless creases he was wearing an indelible print of the wire-diamond springs.

But it felt good to be back in the best hotel on Saint Jaime. One of the few, moreover, where he had never been thrown out. A careful predator leaves certain rewarding patches of jungle unravaged for the sake of future success.

Martel paused near the entrance to the Beachcomber Bar with its fake straw thatch. He knew his hesitation was proof of rustiness, and probably suspect nerve. Once, well within living memory, being flat broke wouldn't have stopped him loping in and ordering the barman to start a tab, he would be so confident of finding somebody to pick it up before the night was out.

Now— The islands weren't as servile these days. The barman might just shake his head and insist on cash, or a room number. And Virginia Quaid had to be given the right impression.

Producing the slim gold cigarette case—Joan DeMain, Dallas,

© 1982 by Jeffry Scott.

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'68—reminded Wally Martel of his track record. That was why he hadn't sold the thing, even after the Snow Valley disaster.

He wished the same was true of the Rolex—Prissy Fanshawe, London, '71—and the diamond cufflinks, donor and date forgotten. Aimlessly rapping a cigarette against the case, Martel tried to recall her to memory. He was getting old, no question. The thought made him sigh.

"Wally, you know you aren't supposed to be here!"

Martel sighed again. Dot Enster, public-relations girl for the Royal Palace Hotel, was pretty and had a soft spot for him, in her own astringent manner, but she wasn't worth a dime and would kill rather than lend—far less give—him even that much. Somehow, the knowledge made her curiously unattractive in Wally's eyes.

"I'm here at a guest's invitation," he told her with dignity.

Her lower lip jutted and she exhaled sharply, agitating her auburn bob, a sure sign of irritation. "Wally, that Quaid woman's up to no good. Why won't you listen to me?"

He chuckled in genuine amusement, and after a moment Dot smiled sheepishly. It *was* crazy, warning a veteran con man and gigolo against a wealthy woman who seemed to have taken a fancy to him.

Dot shook her head resignedly. "Why did you come out here, Wally? You ought to be working God's Waiting Room, Florida. More potential customers your age. In the Caribbean, you've got to be young and strong for your line of work, if that's the right word for it."

Wally lit the cigarette, dribbling smoke from his nostrils. "I came here because it never snows and the only way anyone can ski is on water."

They'd done this routine before. He was always in earnest and Dot Enster always thought he was kidding. Wally smoothed the hair he liked to think of as prematurely grey and smirked. Along with nine out of ten casual friends, Dot didn't suspect his secret.

"You're jealous," he teased. "Why wouldn't Mrs. Quaid be mad for me? The line forms on the right, Dorothy *cara*. I might fit you in around 1989."

She pulled a face. "Stop it with the threats. Seriously, Wally, something stinks. Mrs. Quaid's been prowling Saint Jaime like a lost soul for two days now. A sexy Flying Dutchperson, seeking, forever seeking. Ask yourself, is she settling for *you?*"

There was entreaty in Dot's voice. When Martel dragged himself

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to the island, bitter, punishing himself in the obsessive fight to win back his health and poise, Dot had fed him soup and sandwiches but no sympathy. It was the first platonic friendship of his long and disgraceful life—and the first time he'd been frank about his sins.

And so now Dot, despising herself for the melodrama, wondered whether one of his victims, or a betrayed and plundered woman's relation, was stalking the old rogue, vengeance in mind.

"I'm old enough to be—your elder brother," Wally reprimanded her. "I can stand on my own feet, thanks."

Dot started a reply, choked it down, and felt herself tingle. Wally was smiling at her, an incredibly rich, slowly building smile like richest chocolate with whipped cream folded in, under a sparkling crust of sugar. It was the first time she'd been hit with a Wallace Martel 100-octane special and to her faint alarm and definite irritation it worked.

He moved around her, neatly. "Virginia! It's been four hours—and far too long!" Mrs. Quaid had arrived for their dinner date.

"Are you staying here?" Wally asked.

Virginia Quaid gave him one of her upward-and-sideways glances, which helped him date her. As a young woman, he deduced, she'd been influenced by a movie star now living only in the late shows. Mrs. Quaid was beautiful, but only by dint of working at it, and she must be aware that her reign as a beauty was nearly over. That was a time of life when Wally liked to meet his clients. Gratitude as much as greed is a prime motive working for the con man.

"We—I've got a suite here. I'm living on the yacht, of course. But I love the Royal Caribbean's beach, and it's so tacky, changing and showering in those little shacks out there."

Wally tingled as Dot Enster had done a few minutes earlier. He'd told so many lies intended to create phantom wealth that he couldn't be taken in by them from others and he could tell Mrs. Quaid meant what she'd said, she could afford to squander two hundred a day on a set of rooms used for a few minutes, if at all.

She was speaking again. "I said *we*. It's a habit I must break, Wallace. I—lost my husband recently."

Virginia Quaid had pressed the button tagged *condolence*. Martel launched it: wise, warm, understanding, with a dancing subtext hinting at freedom gained for fresh joys that never descended into crassness or eagerness. It was one of his better lines.

Adjusting his wistful look, he wound up, "I've suffered too, my

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dear." Covering her hand with his own was only natural. Her eyelashes quivered.

Martel's words rang with sincerity. He was thinking about Norma Bogle. The name ought to have steered him clear—anyone content to remain a Bogle manifestly lacked soul. Worse, she'd had very little money. Still, Wally had consoled himself at the time, effortlessly leading her into bigamous marriage, little fish are sweet—and he'd been starving. He shivered in the sultry air of the Royal Caribbean's outdoor restaurant.

Norma Bogle! With her nasty, coarse face sandpapered by the icy winds she courted, and the color of a ripe tomato from sun bounced off snow. To clinch matters, he'd been forced to go on vacation with her. He would never be able to believe she hadn't done it on purpose. She *said* she'd got lost in the woods beneath the snow line. Whatever the true answer, it had been half a day before the ski-rescue team found him. He'd come within minutes of destruction and endured years of torture.

Well, at least he'd managed to sell the wicked Mrs. Bogle's house over her head while he was still in the hospital, before decamping with an impressionable night nurse he later left stranded in Phoenix after trading her camper for a stolen airline ticket and a pretty good forged passport.

Wally concentrated afresh on Virginia Quaid. His strength was that he liked women, enjoyed them. He was prepared to like Mrs. Quaid—with her subtly haggard air whispering excitingly of decadence and endless experience, hardly any of it imaginable, far less printable—not to mention her far-from-subtle decorations of gold and platinum and diamonds.

A big score on the hoof, thought Martel. Yet he couldn't get into the spirit of the thing, not quite. Damn Dot Enster and her misgivings.

"You must see the yacht," Virginia Quaid was saying. "We can't cruise for a few days—the crew's ashore—but my son's always around, he can run us out in the tender. It's quite a view from the sea."

She let him light her cigarette. As if thinking aloud she said, "But maybe not tonight. Tim might strand us aboard until the small hours—he grudges any time spent away from the discos."

Martel didn't respond to the opportunity, if that was what he'd been offered. "No, tonight's bad," he agreed. "I've got to nurse a hot phone—my broker in London and a man in Alaska. Ten years ago

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I promised myself retirement, but even as a hobby making money demands time."

"There'll be other evenings," she said lazily. Her glance stroked him, her nostrils flared. Despite himself, Martel glowed. There was little erotic spark, but as a professional he appreciated watching a peer in action.

Mrs. Quaid insisted on paying for dinner. Any hotel where she stayed, she explained, amounted to her home and she didn't feel right not being hostess. Martel, ready to pantomime chagrin and shock at leaving billfold and credit cards at home, put up the barest token argument.

He walked her down the luminous path of crushed coral. A beach buggy darted out from among the cabs. Its driver was a hefty boy in sawn-off jeans and a great deal of tanned skin upholstering well schooled muscles.

"My son," Mrs. Quaid murmured.

Martel shook the boy's hard hand, said the right things, twinkled at the mother, gave the son a manly grin, waved gracefully, and turned away.

And spun round, almost losing balance, as the beach buggy's motor went up a note. What he saw seemed to please him. He went back to the hotel, gave the number of Virginia Quaid's suite—not an outrageous gamble. The night man was new and she claimed not to use the suite very often. He gave Wally the key without questioning.

She hadn't been lying—not that Wally expected it. The suite had the deadened, patient aura of unoccupied rooms. Several swimsuits and gauzy wraps tossed on the kingsize bed were the only proof that Mrs. Quaid had set foot here.

He wasn't spying, he was living off the country. Wally Martel picked up the phone and started booking calls: New York, London, Paris. In his heyday, he'd made pin money tipping off gossip columns, generally about scandals he'd instigated. Gossip writers tended to last longer than the people of whom they wrote. In one capital or another, he'd find a fink who knew him and could be pumped in return for promises of goodies in the offing.

Dawn was breaking and Mrs. Quaid's bill was considerably higher when Martel slipped out of the hotel and thumbed a ride on a fish-delivery truck back to his lodgings. He wasn't surprised at what he had harvested by phone—but then Wally Martel was a hard man to surprise . . .

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Dot Enster, her jaw set, stepped out of the doorway of the harbormaster's office.

"Where are you off to?" she asked.

Martel winced, very much aware of the launch rounding the jetty, exhaust burbling. "Get the hell away from me!" He made the demand a single, savage word.

She shook her head. "Look, I'm worried, okay? You've pulled other people's strings for so long you can't tell when *you're* being used."

Wally Martel drew himself up. "Go away, Dot, or so help me I'll throw you in the harbor. I know witches are supposed to float but you may be the exception."

Dot glared at him. "Make a fool of yourself then!" she said and marched away.

Wally strolled to the steps at the end of the jetty. The spectacular sundown, a vulgar riot of crimson and topaz, was wasted on him.

Tim took the steps two at a time. "Good to see you, sir. Mom made me swear on a stack of Bibles that I'll get you home again by midnight at the latest."

A trifle sedate and hesitant because the lower steps were slimy, Martel followed Tim to the sparkling toy of a boat. He wondered which disco allowed Tim to cavort bare-chested and presumably shoeless—Saint Jaime, cultivating the rich, had a prevailingly stuffy side regarding dress codes. No doubt the boy went to one of the open-air places on the less fashionable coast.

The yacht had wanted to be a liner when it grew up, and had little reason to feel disappointed. It was moored a couple of miles out, the stars and rubies of its riding lights mere pinpoints from the shore.

Chartered from Barbados, Martel concluded, when they neared the vessel. He studied such things and it was another encouraging clue to Mrs. Quaid's bankroll—or rather, that of her late husband. The crew's leave had been cancelled, they were to report for duty the following morning. Wally Martel, living near the waterfront—by circumstance rather than choice—found it useful at times. One could hardly avoid learning such trivial news of comings and goings.

Tim helped him up onto the companionway, portside.

Martel, who detested being touched except by lovers, mastered his urge to twitch free as he was half lifted to the broad, slightly swaying platform.

"Have a good time, Mr. Martel." Tim's teeth showed white as he leaped back into the launch. "I guess you'll find Mom on your own."

Wally didn't wait to watch the wake disappear in the sudden

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tropical darkness. He stumped up the stairs and hauled himself on deck.

Virginia Quaid looked superb in an off-the-shoulder crimson dress, skirt slit to the hip. "I'm so glad you could come, Wallace," she greeted him, a tremor in her voice.

Martel bowed, kissed the back of her extended hand, continued the forward move, and brushed his lips to her cheek. It felt feverish, he thought. So were her eyes.

Clasping his hand, she led him below. The stateroom was Wally Martel's scene: light wood panels, yielding carpet, the very body odor of money.

Mrs. Quaid sank into the white leather couch, crossing her legs so that a long, taut muscle showed in her thigh. She licked her lips. "Make me a drink, Wally."

Martel took an upright chair facing her, its back to a corner of the big cabin. He smiled wolfishly. "Business before pleasure, honey. I hate dealing on a gutful of booze. No offense, but I suspect a thimble of your liquor might be more than enough."

Virginia Quaid looked old in an instant.

Martel switched off the smile. "Tell your fancy man to come in. Let's play with a full deck. I heard a bump just now when he drifted in with the engine shut down."

Her corded, abruptly ugly throat pulsed. She might have been reading a script for the first time. "Fancy man?"

"Tim, the so-called son. Lady, I saw the way you looked at him last night when the pair of you were driving away. The last son to get a look like that went by the name of Oedipus."

"Who's Oedipus?" Tim sounded interested. He'd entered silently by a door Wally had missed in his initial sizing-up of the space. Indoors, Tim looked even bigger.

"Trouble," Mrs. Quaid answered.

Tim sat on the arm of the couch, one bronzed paw smoothing and kneading the white-marble apple of her shoulder as he stared at Martel. "I doubt it, Virgie. So he's not exactly buying our line—tough. I could snap him over my knee. No problem."

Martel's eyes narrowed, but his tone was steady. "Let's not even discuss getting physical. Here's how we do things, kids. I'll tell you what I think and you put me right if I stray."

"I want to hear this." Tim stopped getting up as Mrs. Quaid spoke.

Wally said, "Here's a broken-down old con man, what my dear Mama used to refer to as a gigolo, just getting by, wrinkles and bald

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spot and all, because sometimes a fat German lady or a vinegary old Brit spinster or whatever gets careless about leaving her purse when she goes to powder her nose.

"All of a sudden, this genuinely rich lady, access to some very heavy bread, and a good brain that got it for her in the first place—along with the legs and the rest—suddenly she wants me with a passion. Virginia, let me tell you something about being a con man: the minute you think it's easy, you're dead. You go through life knowing you depend on a big mouth and a pack of lies. You'd better be constantly amazed that anyone believes a word of them. You'd better wake up every morning ready for them to stop believing and see you for what you are."

The stateroom canted a little as the vessel tilted to a swell. "Like I saw you, sister," Martel continued. Never breaking eye contact, he reached to the humidor beside the chair, took a cigar, lit it with care, and blew dragon-pennants of smoke.

"Never try to con a con man, Virginia, is what I'm groping to express. No way could you fall for my line, but you pretended you had. Meaning the line didn't matter, it was me you needed."

Martel admired the start of velvet ash at the tip of the cigar. "I'm not the vainest of guys. I know I'm over—forty-five. Grey hair, thin face, five-eleven. No Charles Atlas. Underweight for my height, all lean meat. Plus, I'm penny ante these days. Barring one nothing little lady who's a pain in my sense of dignity, nobody would get too fussed if I upped and vanished. Point of fact, I'm exactly the type guy who's *expected* to do just that, sooner or later."

"You talk too much," Tim said. Again, but with more difficulty, Virginia pulled him back beside her.

"Well," Wally addressed her, "I ran my inventory and then I spoke to some contacts about you. You said you lost your husband recently, Virginia. I didn't understand you meant like in the last seventy-two hours.

"Because New York thinks Blair Quaid is alive and well, the way he was when you both flew down to Barbados for your vacation. Alive and well, but not the happiest of guys. Because his wife keeps being an item with this one and that one, and they're getting younger and younger and dumber and dumber. Don't prove me right, Tim, hear this out!"

Everybody shifted position ever so slightly.

"I asked what Blair Quaid looks like and they told me he's sixty years of age, grey hair thinning on top, thin face, watches his weight,

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no obvious scars or birthmarks—same as me." He waited, and then the wolf grinned again. He raised a hand demonstratively. "Guess I get the cigar."

Mrs. Quaid nodded, bafflement in her gaze. "Correct. So you shouldn't be here."

Dismissing the riddle, she went on tiredly, "When the crew went on shore leave four days ago I was ashore too. Tim stayed behind with Blair. There was a fight. Tim hit him too hard and lost his head. We might have got by with that if I'd been around—an accidental fall. Blair was not notoriously sober.

"But Tim took good ol' Blair out to hell and gone in the launch and dropped him along with half a ton of spare anchor chain."

She sucked hungrily at a cigarette she lit from the previous one. "We need a body. Blair's going to get that accidental death in front of witnesses. That will satisfy everyone, especially me, because I get the bulk of Blair's estate."

Belatedly, she smiled up at Tim. "*We* get it, sweetest."

"Ain't never going to happen," Wally Martel announced cheerfully. "But run the rest of it past me all the same."

She took the challenge. "The crew will be back tomorrow. We'll keep you in my cabin. There are two ladder things, companionways, either side of the boat. With platforms at the bottom, yes? You can go straight from my cabin to the companionway providing the weather's calm—it's meant to make it easy for swimming.

"Tomorrow afternoon Tim walks you out of the cabin to the platform, to the launch. Blair always got high if he wasn't fishing. If anybody spots you and Tim, and chances are they won't, they'll just think it's Blair crocked again.

"Tim takes the launch out to the reef. Then there's this terrible mishap. The launch blows up, catches fire, and sinks. Tim's thrown clear. At that distance he can drop overside and swim clear. I'll be keeping the crew hopping, here. I'll have lost my emerald bracelet and anyone wanting to stay hired will be hunting for it."

Martel controlled the shake in his hands. He knew that if he inhaled the cigar he'd be sick. "Nice scenario. I'm out cold in the launch, huh? Face down in a pool of gas to make sure identification doesn't hit any snags."

"That's it. The police down this way are pretty sloppy, I hear. And who identifies the body? His next of kin. Me." Virginia Quaid's lips pursed sourly. "Sorry, but it has to be you. A close match—and, like you said, expendable. Nobody to miss you. But don't sell yourself

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short, Wallace—you've got a good line. If I was into geriatrics I might even give you a whirl—you wouldn't be cheap, but I hate cheap things."

"Ain't going to happen," Wally Martel repeated.

She stood up. "You left word ashore. Letter to be opened if you aren't around to collect it tomorrow, like that? I'll risk it. I have to—we're committed, all three of us. You said it, Martel—you live on a pack of lies, so who'll believe you?"

The humidor's lid was solid carved wood with a ceramic underside forming the airtight lip. He took it in his left hand—Tim tensed to spring—and smashed it against his right shin.

The noise of impact had nothing to do with flesh. There was a small protesting clang.

"Skiing accident," Martel explained laconically. "Amputation, folks. I invested a lot of time and sweat in learning to walk right and it's good enough to fool my best friends. That's why you won't be using me for a ringer. Maybe you could fix it to mess up my face, but the late Mr. Quaid had two good legs and I've only got one. Sure, the law's kind of happy-go-lucky here and death spooks them at the best of times, but the sloppiest medical examiner is going to discern a puzzling little flaw in the deceased."

He chuckled, and the chuckle became a laugh that set tears at the corners of his cunning eyes.

Mrs. Quaid whispered a foul word with the fervency of a prayer. Shocked out of hilarity, Wally Martel recognized rage and calculation and went cold.

She clawed at Tim's arm. "Kill him! We've got to anyway! He knows!"

Martel had parted with the gold cigarette case at last that morning. It had given him enough funds to pick and choose his illegal firearm. There was always a selection in any community visited by sailors. He had paid extra for a .38 revolver with the hammer shrouded. That kind never snags on the lining of a pocket.

His left hand was locked on his right wrist, the revolver's butt was jammed against his left knee, and his elbows were pressed in against his sides. "Not this trip," said Wally. "Virginia, what you do is tie the kid up. And I mean *tie*. Then we talk consultancy fee, confidentiality, you and the kid getting the chance to run. Every buck you have in loose cash, all your baubles, anything worth lifting from this tub.

"Make it a big heap of goodies. You're too smart to hold out on

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me. You've got your credit cards for running-money. You put the loot on that launch, take me and it ashore, and then you're free to do whatever your sweet nature decrees."

With Tim securely bound—Mrs. Quaid had been ruthless with the heavy cords decorating the stateroom's bar, nautical fashion—Martel added, mock regretfully, "Kid, I wouldn't bet heavy money on her every untying you."

"Do me one favor." She had difficulty gasping the words out. *"Don't gloat."*

He tipped the pistol briefly in acknowledgement. "Yeah, that's no class. But you've got to make allowances, Mrs. Q. It's better than a fine line of coke being on top of things again."

Then the stateroom exploded with a white glare that blinded and terrorized the three people whose nerves were at breaking strain.

A vast, inhuman voice battered at them from a bullhorn. "Private yacht, ahoy! Saint Jaime police! We're coming aboard."

Virginia Quaid, fleshbone grey in the searchlight's cruel brilliance, dragged clawed fingers down her cheeks. Spots of blood showed black against the corpse mask. But she had the last word.

"Top of things, you bastard? *Down the tube, you mean!"* Wally Martel was too busy undogging the porthole and dropping the .38 overside to swear at her.

Dot Enster said, "It's an ill wind. Reporters are coming in from all over, the hotel's booked out, and it isn't even the high season. Blair Quaid was a multi-bulti-millionaire, Wally. They're saying this will be the crime story of the decade."

Martel sat up on the bunk. Through the grille in the cell door he could see only a patch of her auburn hair and one curious eye—which was far too much.

"Don't speak to me, you ingrate. Not until you've raised the money to bail me."

Dot sounded embarrassed. "I can't, Wally. I've spoken to the Justice Minister. He says that demanding money with menaces is blackmail and Saint Jaime doesn't give bail to blackmailers."

Paradoxically, his indignation was real. "I came on like Perry Mason, damn their eyes! How can they take that murdering bitch's word against mine?"

Clearing her throat, Dot replied, "Easily, Wally." She was gripping the grille. "But the word's that you won't get more than seven

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years' sentence and they'll do their best to deport you so you serve the time Stateside. I got the Justice Minister to promise that."

"How can I fail," Wally told her bitterly, "with a great broad like you at bat for me?"

Dot was offended. "I'm the one who saved you, Wally. Seeing you go off in that launch, old and alone, I got the most terrible premonition you were in danger. I'm the one made the police go out to the yacht!"

"You've told me, you've told me!"

"Well, what have you got to say then?"

Frustration always gave Wallace Martel a nagging pain in the leg that wasn't there any more. He rubbed it furiously. "Come back tomorrow," he mumbled. "I'll be here, same stand. Maybe by then I'll have found the proper words."

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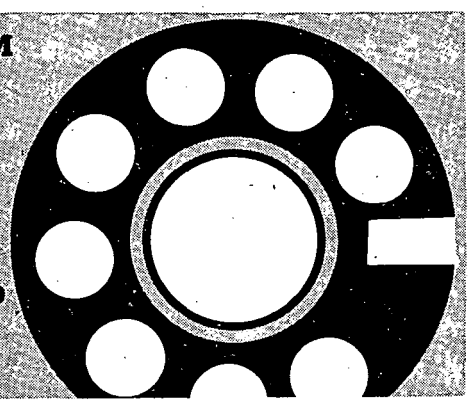

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Katie and Addie found the news as fascinating as Dorrie had known they would . . .

VILLAGE CHORUS

by CLEMENTS JORDAN

Dorrie just happened to be wiping off the window casing in her front room when Strella Dean went by on her way to the village, her black curls blowing every which way in the wind. Dorrie flung down her dust rag so as to be the first to tell the others. Katie Bayne wont going to get ahead of her today!

Dorrie tucked her hands under her apron while she waited at Katie's back door. She hadn't knowed it was so cold but she wouldn't take the time to go back for a wrap. Katie had the look of somebody in the middle of a chore when she opened the door. After all, it was the busiest time of the day. But "Come on in," she told Dorrie, "and set down."

"Oh, no, I hadn't better. Come on over to Addie's and I'll tell everybody at the same time." Eagerly Katie came with her and they walked across the road to Adelaide's. Soon the three were standing on her back porch—nobody but a sloven would set-down visit this time of morning. Dorrie and Kate looked enviously at Adelaide who had thought to wrap a shawl around her shoulders. They stood with their arms crossed over their chests, the palms of their hands clasping their arms.

The three women had passed most of their lives together. Addie and Doris were sisters-in-law. Francie, the fourth member of their group, was away nursing a sick mother. They knew she would be outdone when she heard she had missed the news, but they sure as shooting would tell her every word.

Katie and Addie looked at Dorrie with all their eyes and she made them wait like a good teller ought. Then she said, "Strella Dean passed going to the village looking neither to the right nor to the left, walking like her shirttail was on fire. If she'd looked around, she could of seen me at the window. *Before ten o'clock even!*"

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They found the news as fascinating as Dorrie had known they would. They stood for a moment, their eyes gazing at distances, their mouths puckered in silent whistles as they considered possibilities.

Dorrie had had longer to think. Besides, it was her news and it was fitting that she have first say. "Everybody knows she usually goes to the store three o'clock like any normal woman who's got her work to do, or else she sends one of the kids when they get home from school. That is, if they just want a little something or only the mail at the post office."

The others mulled this over. Katie said, "Yeeees—maybe she got word that company's coming. All of a sudden like, you know? Might be somebody from Fred's job. His boss, you reckon? She'd have to get down there quick to have time to cook things up for dinner."

They thought about this a long minute, as such a good idea deserved, their minds so intent they no longer noticed the cold. Then Katie amended her own solution.

"Or maybe a man wouldn't notice much. Make a pan of biscuits and stir up a little cake and you can open a jar of most anything else you got. Take my Orville—give him a piece of chocolate cake and you could serve him yesterday's hash. Not that I would," she added quickly.

Dorrie and Addie nodded. They knew how men were.

Dorrie pondered a minute longer and said, "It could be Fred's mother or sister. You know how persnickety they are. I'd hate to feed either one of them on short notice." The others groaned in agreement.

"Wait a minute," Addie broke in, like she'd just been waiting for the others to get through chattering before presenting her really good idea. "Wait now," she repeated. "The store's not the only place in the village. Suppose she's going to the doctor and don't want Fred or the kids to know. She was walking real fast you said, like she didn't want anybody to come out and delay her none. Now what you reckon is wrong with her?"

Dorrie, the quickest thinker—though she didn't always get things straight—said, "I bet anything she's fixing to have another baby. You'd think three was enough for poor folks." Dorrie had no children. "And Fred having to get up in the dark to borrow a ride into town, working and scratching the way he does. There's things you can do these days not to have so many—" She stopped. What to "do" would be good for an afternoon's talk some other time. "I think three chil-

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dren's a gracious plenty," she finished neatly, thanking her stars that Francie was away. Francie had five kids.

Addie felt that Dorrie had stole her thunder. After a minute's digestive silence, she said, "Maybe it's something real bad, like an operation or the like and she don't want a soul to know—even Fred. Maybe she's being brave for Fred and the children's sake."

Katie, the tender-heartedest, began to sniffle. But she didn't like Strella enough to have everybody feel sorry for her, so she was real pleased to think of something else.

"Wait!" she squealed. "We all forgot the post office. Maybe she went down there to pick up a letter she didn't want the children to get hold of."

The others greeted this with the perfect response—silence. It felt right. They looked at Katie with respect.

"What kind of letter?"

"Who from?"

Who indeed? They needed a minute to think about that.

"I know." Dorrie was as proud as a cow with two tails at milking time. "How about that man laying them railroad ties down by her house?"

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

All three knew they had solved the riddle.

Adelaide added the proof. "They said that when him and the others was working down there last summer and hot enough to fry pork chops, Strella went right out where they was and asked them to come and draw theirselves cool water whenever they wanted to. And that one—what's his name—?"

Unfortunately, no one knew his name.

"Well, anyhow, he laid down that humongous hammer they use—he wont wearing the sign of a shirt—and he went up in the yard and him and her stood there laughing and talking and she was shaking all that black hair around. They worked near her house three days. No telling how many trips he made to that well."

"He must of squished when he walked."

They bent over laughing. Katie said right cute things sometimes.

"Well, there you are," Dorrie said at last. The others knew the rules. It was Dorrie's right to sum things up. "It's just luck I was working at the front of the house instead of the back the way I generally am at ten o'clock. No telling how long they been writing

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to each other. No wonder she was ashamed to look anybody in the face, going by so fast.

"You all know me. This is 1927 and I'm modren as the next one—" Katie and Addie nodded in agreement "—but I say she *ought* to be ashamed, with a husband and three innocent little children. It wouldn't surprise me a tittle if they wasn't writing and planning to run off with each other."

They knew to their very marrow the truth of this and shivered with cold and the way life was.

They parted quickly.

Dorrie went in her back door and looked both ways out of the front window before getting her sweater and setting off over the fields to her mother's. The ironing wouldn't go anywhere before she got back.

Katie hadn't seen her sister in so long it was a shame. Orville and the kids could eat stew one more time. She left by her back door.

Adelaide had intended to rench out a few things, but there was more to life than washing. Like the preacher said, you ought to give a thought to those worse off than you. She packed a basket of apples for Mrs. Lovejoy, poor soul, crippled up the way she was. She did so love a good conversation. She put in a few extras. Might as well go by Mrs. Wells's too—and maybe Mrs. Hallam's if there was time.

Three weeks later when Fred Dean put a bullet in Strella and one in himself, no one was a mite surprised. And everyone was sorry as could be for those poor orphan children.

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a *NEW* Ehrengraf story by

LAWRENCE BLOCK

This is EQMM's sixth story about Martin H. Ehrengraf, Lawrence Block's "corrector of destinies," a contemporary version of the early Randolph Mason created by Melville Davisson Post. The little lawyer's client in this case is exquisite, shapely, self-assured Evelyn Throop. It is Ehrengraf's great good fortune always to find himself representing innocent clients, but few of these clients have ever been as singleminded as Miss Throop in proclaiming their innocence—in spite of the overwhelming evidence to the contrary . . .

THE EHRENGRAF ALTERNATIVE

by LAWRENCE BLOCK

"What's most unfortunate," Ehrengraf said, "is that there seems to be a witness."

Evelyn Throop nodded in fervent agreement. "Mrs. Keppner," she said.

"Howard Bierstadt's housekeeper."

"She was devoted to him. She'd been with him for years."

"And she claims she saw you shoot him three times in the chest."

"I know," Evelyn Throop said. "I can't imagine why she would say something like that. It's completely untrue."

A thin smile turned up the corners of Martin Ehrengraf's mouth. Already he felt himself warming to his client, exhilarated by the prospect of acting in her defense. It was the little lawyer's great good fortune always to find himself representing innocent clients, but few of those clients were as singleminded as Miss Throop in proclaiming their innocence.

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The woman sat on the edge of her iron cot with her shapely legs crossed at the ankle. She seemed so utterly in possession of herself that she might have been almost anywhere but in a jail cell, charged with the murder of her lover. Her age, according to the papers, was forty-six. Ehrengraf would have guessed her to be perhaps a dozen years younger. She was not rich—Ehrengraf, like most lawyers, did have a special fondness for wealthy clients—but she had excellent breeding. It was evident not only in her exquisite facial bones but in her positively ducal self-assurance.

"I'm sure we'll uncover the explanation of Mrs. Keppner's calumny," he said gently. "For now, why don't we go over what actually happened."

"Certainly. I was at my home that evening when Howard called. He was in a mood and wanted to see me. I drove over to his house. He made drinks for both of us and paced around a great deal. He was extremely agitated."

"Over what?"

"Leona wanted him to marry her. Leona Weybright."

"The cookbook writer?"

"Yes. Howard was not the sort of man to get married, or even to limit himself to a single relationship. He believed in a double standard and was quite open about it. He expected his women to be faithful while reserving the option of infidelity to himself. If one was going to be involved with Howard Bierstadt, one had to accept this."

"As you accepted it."

"As I accepted it," Evelyn Throop agreed. "Leona evidently pretended to accept it but could not, and Howard didn't know what to do about her. He wanted to break up with her but was afraid of the possible consequences. He thought she might turn suicidal and he didn't want her death on his conscience."

"And he discussed all of this with you."

"Oh, yes. He often confided in me about his relationship with Leona." Evelyn Throop permitted herself a smile. "I played a very important role in his life, Mr. Ehrengraf. I suppose he would have married me if there'd been any reason to do so. I was his true confidante. Leona was just one of a long string of mistresses."

Ehrengraf nodded. "According to the prosecution," he said carefully, "you were pressuring him to marry you."

"That's quite untrue."

"No doubt." He smiled. "Continue."

The woman sighed. "There's not much more to say. He went into

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the other room to freshen our drinks. There was the report of a gunshot."

"I believe there were three shots."

"Perhaps there were. I can only remember the volume of the noise. It was so startling. I rushed in immediately and saw him on the floor, the gun by his outstretched hand. I guess I bent over and picked up the gun. I don't remember doing so, but I must have done because the next thing I knew I was standing there holding the gun." Evelyn Throop closed her eyes, evidently overwhelmed by the memory. "Then Mrs. Keppner was there—I believe she screamed, and then she went off to call the police. I just stood there for a while and then I guess I sat down in a chair and waited for the police to come and tell me what to do."

"And they brought you here and put you in a cell."

"Yes. I was quite astonished. I couldn't imagine why they would do such a thing, and then it developed that Mrs. Keppner had sworn she saw me shoot Howard."

Ehrengraf was respectfully silent for a moment. Then he said, "It seems they found some corroboration for Mrs. Keppner's story."

"What do you mean?"

"The gun," Ehrengraf said. "A .32 caliber revolver. I believe it was registered to you, was it not?"

"It was my gun."

"How did Mr. Bierstadt happen to have it?"

"I brought it to him."

"At his request?"

"Yes. When we spoke on the telephone, he specifically asked me to bring the gun. He said something about wanting to protect himself from burglars. I never thought he would shoot himself."

"But he did."

"He must have done. He was upset about Leona. Perhaps he felt guilty, or that there was no way to avoid hurting her."

"Wasn't there a paraffin test?" Ehrengraf mused. "As I recall, there were no nitrite particles found in Mr. Bierstadt's hand, which would seem to indicate he had not fired a gun recently."

"I don't really understand those tests," Evelyn Throop said. "But I'm told they're not absolutely conclusive."

"And the police gave you a test as well," Ehrengraf went on. "Didn't they?"

"Yes."

"And found nitrite particles in your right hand."

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"Of course," Evelyn Throop said. "I'd fired the gun that evening before I took it along to Howard's house. I hadn't used it in the longest time, since I first practiced with it at a pistol range, so I cleaned it and to make sure it was in good operating condition I test-fired it before I went to Howard's."

"At a pistol range?"

"That wouldn't have been convenient. I just stopped at a deserted spot along a country road and fired a few shots."

"I see."

"I told the police all of this, of course."

"Of course. Before they gave you the paraffin test?"

"After the test, as it happens. The incident had quite slipped my mind in the excitement of the moment, but they gave me the test and said it was evident I'd fired a gun, and at that point I recalled having stopped the car and firing off a couple of rounds before continuing on to Howard's."

"Where you gave Mr. Bierstadt the gun."

"Yes."

"Whereupon he in due course took it off into another room and fired three shots into his heart," Ehrengraf murmured. "Your Mr. Bierstadt would look to be one of the most determined suicides in human memory."

"You don't believe me."

"But I do believe you," he said. "Which is to say that I believe you did not shoot Mr. Bierstadt. Whether or not he did in fact die by his own hand is not, of course, something to which either you or I can testify."

"How else could he have died?" The woman's gaze narrowed. "Unless he really was genuinely afraid of burglars, and unless he did surprise one in the other room. But wouldn't I have heard sounds of a struggle? Of course, I was in another room a fair distance away, and there was music playing, and I did have things on my mind."

"I'm sure you did."

"And perhaps Mrs. Keppner saw the burglar shoot Howard, and then she fainted or something. I suppose that's possible, isn't it?"

"Eminently possible," Ehrengraf assured her.

"She might have come to when I had already entered the room and picked up the gun, and the whole incident could have been compressed in her mind. She wouldn't remember having fainted and so she might now actually believe she saw me kill Howard, while all along she saw something entirely different." Evelyn Throop had

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been looking off into the middle distance as she formulated her theory and now she focused her eyes upon the diminutive attorney. "It could have happened that way," she said, "couldn't it?"

"It could have happened precisely that way," Ehrengraf said. "It could have happened in any of innumerable ways. Ah, Miss Throop—" and now the lawyer rubbed his small hands together "—that's the whole beauty of it. There are any number of alternatives to the prosecution's argument, but of course they don't see them. Give the police a supposedly ironclad case and they look no further. It is not their task to examine alternatives. But it is our task, Miss Throop, to find not merely *an* alternative but the correct alternative, the ideal alternative. And in just that fashion we will make a free woman of you."

"You seem very confident, Mr. Ehrengraf."

"I am."

"And prepared to believe in my innocence."

"Unequivocally. Without question."

"I find that refreshing," Evelyn Throop said. "I even believe you'll get me acquitted."

"I fully expect to," Ehrengraf said. "Now let me see, is there anything else we have to discuss at present?"

"Yes."

"And what would that be?"

"Your fee," said Evelyn Throop.

Back in his office, seated behind a desk which he kept as untidy as he kept his own person immaculate, Martin H. Ehrengraf sat back and contemplated the many extraordinary qualities of his latest client. In his considerable experience, while clients were not invariably opposed to a discussion of his fees, they were certainly loathe to raise the matter. But Evelyn Throop, possessor of dove-grey eyes and remarkable facial bones, had proved an exception.

"My fees are high," Ehrengraf had told her, "but they are payable only in the event that my clients are acquitted. If you don't emerge from this ordeal scot-free, you owe me nothing. Even my expenses will be at my expense."

"And if I get off?"

"Then you will owe me one hundred thousand dollars. And I must emphasize, Miss Throop, that the fee will be due me however you win your freedom. It is not inconceivable that neither of us will ever see the inside of a courtroom, that your release when it comes will

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appear not to have been the result of my efforts at all. I will, nevertheless, expect to be paid in full."

The grey eyes looked searchingly into the lawyer's own. "Yes," she said after a moment. "Yes, of course. Well, that seems fair. If I'm released I won't really care how the end was accomplished, will I?"

Ehrengraf said nothing. Clients often whistled a different tune at a later date, but one could burn that bridge when one came to it.

"One hundred thousand dollars seems reasonable," the woman continued. "I suppose any sum would seem reasonable when one's life and liberty hangs in the balance. Of course, you must know I have no money of my own."

"Perhaps your family—"

She shook her head. "I can trace my ancestors back to William the Conqueror," she said, "and there were Throops who made their fortune in whaling and the China trade, but I'm afraid the money's run out over the generations. However, I shouldn't have any problem paying your fee."

"Oh?"

"I'm Howard's chief beneficiary," she explained. "I've seen his will and it makes it unmistakably clear that I held first place in his affections. After a small cash bequest to Mrs. Keppner for her loyal years of service, and after leaving his art collection—which, I grant you, *is* substantial—to Leona, the remainder comes to me. There may be a couple of cash bequests to charities but nothing that amounts to much. So while I'll have to wait for the will to make its way through probate, I'm sure I can borrow on my expectations and pay you your fee within a matter of days of my release from jail, Mr. Ehrengraf."

"A day that should come in short order," Ehrengraf said.

"That's your department," Evelyn Throop said, and smiled serenely.

Ehrengraf smiled now, recalling her smile, and made a little tent of his fingertips on the desktop. An exceptional woman, he told himself, and one on whose behalf it would be an honor to extend himself.

It was difficult, of course. Shot with the woman's own gun, and a witness to swear that she'd shot him. Difficult, certainly, but scarcely impossible.

The little lawyer leaned back, closed his eyes, and considered alternatives.

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Some days later, Ehrengraf was seated at his desk reading the poems of William Ernest Henley, who had written so confidently of being the master of one's fate and the captain of one's soul. The telephone rang. Ehrengraf set his book down, located the instrument amid the desktop clutter, and answered it.

"Ehrengraf," said Ehrengraf.

He listened for a moment, spoke briefly in reply, and replaced the receiver. Smiling brightly, he started for the door, then paused to check his appearance in a mirror.

His tie was navy-blue, with a demure below-the-knot pattern of embroidered rams' heads. For a moment Ehrengraf thought of stopping at his house and changing it for his Caedmon Society necktie, one he'd taken to wearing on triumphal occasions. He glanced at his watch and decided not to squander the time.

Later, recalling the decision, he wondered if it hinted at prescience.

"Quite remarkable," Evelyn Throop said. "Although I suppose I should have at least considered the possibility that Mrs. Keppner was lying. After all, I knew for a fact that she was testifying to something that didn't happen to be true. But for some reason I assumed it was an honest mistake on her part."

"One hesitates to believe the worst of people," Ehrengraf said.

"That's exactly it, of course. Besides, I rather took her for granted."

"So, it appears, did Mr. Bierstadt."

"And that was his mistake, wasn't it?" Evelyn Throop sighed. "Dora Keppner had been with him for years. Who would have guessed she'd been in love with him? Although I gather their relationship was physical at one point."

"There was a suggestion to that effect in the note she left."

"And I understand he wanted to get rid of her—to discharge her."

"The note seems to have indicated considerable mental disturbance," Ehrengraf said. "There were other jottings in a notebook found in Mrs. Keppner's attic bedroom. The impression seems to be that either she and her employer had been intimate in the past or that she entertained a fantasy to that effect. Her attitude in recent weeks apparently became less and less the sort proper to a servant, and either Mr. Bierstadt intended to let her go or she feared that he did and—well, we know what happened."

"She shot him." Evelyn Throop frowned. "She must have been in the room when he went to freshen the drinks. I thought he'd put

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the gun in his pocket but perhaps he still had it in his hand. He would have set it down when he made the drinks and she could have snatched it up and shot him and been out of the room before I got there." The grey eyes moved to encounter Ehrengraf's. "She didn't leave any fingerprints on the gun."

"She seems to have worn gloves. She was wearing a pair when she took her own life. A test indicated nitrite particles in the right glove."

"Couldn't they have gotten there when she committed suicide?"

"It's unlikely," Ehrengraf said. "She didn't shoot herself, you see. She took poison."

"How awful," Evelyn Throop said. "I hope it was quick."

"Mercifully so," said Ehrengraf. Clearly this woman was the captain of her soul, he thought, not to mention master of her fate. Or ought it to be mistress of her fate?

And yet, he realized abruptly, she was not entirely at ease.

"I've been released," she said, "as is of course quite obvious. All charges have been dropped. A man from the district attorney's office explained everything to me."

"That was considerate of him."

"He didn't seem altogether happy. I had the feeling he didn't really believe I was innocent after all."

"People believe what they wish to believe," Ehrengraf said smoothly. "The state's whole case collapses without their star witness, and after that witness has confessed to the crime herself and taken her life in the bargain, well, what does it matter what a stubborn district attorney chooses to believe?

"The important thing," Ehrengraf said, "is that you've been set free. You're innocent of all charges."

"Yes."

His eyes searched hers. "Is there a problem, Miss Throop?"

"There is, Mr. Ehrengraf."

"Dear lady," he began, "if you could just tell me—"

"The problem concerns your fee."

Ehrengraf's heart sank. Why did so many clients disappoint him in precisely this fashion? At the onset, with the sword of justice hanging over their throats, they agreed eagerly to whatever he proposed. Remove the sword and their agreeability went with it.

But that was not it at all.

"The most extraordinary thing," Evelyn Throop was saying. "I told you the terms of Howard's will. The paintings to Leona, a few

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thousand dollars here and there to various charities, a modest bequest to Mrs. Keppner— I suppose she won't get that now, will she?"

"Hardly."

"Well, that's something. Though it doesn't amount to much. At any rate, the balance is to go to me. The residue, after the bequests have been made and all debts settled and the state and federal taxes been paid, all that remains comes to me."

"So you explained."

"I intended to pay you out of what I received, Mr. Ehrengraf. Well, you're more than welcome to every cent I get. You can buy yourself a couple of hamburgers and a milkshake."

"I don't understand."

"It's the damned paintings," Evelyn Throop said. "They're worth an absolute fortune. I didn't realize how much he spent on them in the first place or how rapidly they appreciated in value. Nor did I have any idea how deeply mortgaged everything else he owned was. He had some investment reversals over the past few months and he'd taken out a second mortgage on his home and sold off stocks and other holdings. There's a little cash and a certain amount of equity in the real estate, but it'll take all of that to pay the estate taxes on the several million dollars' worth of paintings that go free and clear to that bitch Leona."

"You have to pay the taxes?"

"No question about it," she said bitterly. "The estate pays the taxes and settles the debts. Then all the paintings go straight to America's favorite cook. I hope she chokes on them." Evelyn Throop sighed heavily, collected herself. "Please forgive the dramatics, Mr. Ehrengraf."

"They're quite understandable, dear lady."

"I didn't intend to lose control of myself in that fashion. But I feel this deeply. I know Howard had no intention of disinheriting me and having that woman get everything. It was his unmistakable intention to leave me the greater portion, and a cruel trick of fate has thwarted him in that purpose. Mr. Ehrengraf, I owe you one hundred thousand dollars. That was our agreement and I consider myself bound by it."

Ehrengraf made no reply.

"But I don't know how I can possibly pay you. Oh, I'll pay what I can, as I can, but I'm a woman of modest means. I couldn't honestly expect to discharge the debt in full within my lifetime."

"My dear Miss Throop." Ehrengraf was moved, and his hand went

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involuntarily to the knot of his necktie. "My dear Miss Throop," he said again, "I beg you not to worry yourself. Do you know Henley, Miss Throop?"

"Henley?"

"The poet," said Ehrengraf, and quoted:

" 'In the fell clutch of circumstance,
I have not winced nor cried aloud:
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.'

"William Ernest Henley, Miss Throop. Born 1849, died 1903. Bloody but unbowed, Miss Throop. 'I have not yet begun to fight.' That was John Paul Jones, Miss Throop, not a poet at all, a naval commander of the Revolutionary War, but the sentiment, dear lady, is worthy of a poet. 'Things are seldom what they seem, Skim milk masquerades as cream.' William Schwenk Gilbert, Miss Throop."

"I don't understand."

"Alternatives, Miss Throop. Alternatives!" The little lawyer was on his feet, pacing, gesticulating with precision. "I tell you only what I told you before. There are always alternatives available to us."

The grey eyes narrowed in thought. "I suppose you mean we could sue to overturn the will," she said. "That occured to me, but I thought you only handled criminal cases."

"And so I do."

"I wonder if I could find another lawyer who would contest the will on a contingency basis. Perhaps you know someone—"

"Ah, Miss Throop," said Ehrengraf, sitting back down and placing his fingertips together. "Contest the will? Life is too short for litigation. An unlikely sentiment for an attorney to voice, I know, but nonetheless valid for it. Put lawsuits far from your mind. Let us first see if we cannot find—" a smile blossomed on his lips "—the Ehrengraf alternative."

Ehrengraf, a shine on his black wingtip shoes and a white carnation on his lapel, strode briskly up the cinder path from his car to the center entrance of the Bierstadt house. In the crisp autumn air, the ivy-covered brick mansion in its spacious grounds took on an aura suggestive of a college campus. Ehrengraf noticed this and touched his tie, a distinctive specimen sporting a half-inch stripe of royal-blue flanked by two narrower stripes, one of gold and the other of a particularly vivid green, all on a deep navy field. It was the tie

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he had very nearly worn to the meeting with his client some weeks earlier.

Now, he trusted, it would be rather more appropriate.

He eschewed the doorbell in favor of the heavy brass knocker, and in a matter of seconds the door swung inward. Evelyn Throop met him with a smile.

"Dear Mr. Ehrengraf," she said. "It's kind of you to meet me here. In poor Howard's home."

"Your home now," Ehrengraf murmured.

"Mine," she agreed. "Of course, there are legal processes to be gone through but I've been allowed to take possession. And I think I'm going to be able to keep the place. Now that the paintings are mine, I'll be able to sell some of them to pay the taxes and settle other claims against the estate. But let me show you around. This is the living room, of course, and here's the room where Howard and I were having drinks that night—"

"That fateful night," said Ehrengraf.

"And here's the room where Howard was killed. He was preparing drinks at the sideboard over there. He was lying here when I found him. And—"

Ehrengraf watched politely as his client pointed out where everything had taken place.

Then he followed her to another room where he accepted a small glass of Calvados.

For herself, Evelyn Throop poured a pony of Bénédictine.

"What shall we drink to?" she asked him.

To your spectacular eyes, he thought, but suggested instead that she propose a toast.

"To the Ehrengraf alternative," she said.

They drank.

"The Ehrengraf alternative," she said again. "I didn't know what to expect when we last saw each other. I thought you must have had some sort of complicated legal maneuver in mind, perhaps some way around the extortionate tax burden the government levies upon even the most modest inheritance. I had no idea the whole circumstances of poor Howard's murder would wind up turned utterly upside down."

"It was quite extraordinary," Ehrengraf allowed.

"I had been astonished enough to learn that Mrs. Keppner had murdered Howard and then taken her own life. Imagine how I felt to learn that she *wasn't* a murderer and that she *hadn't* committed suicide but that she'd actually *herself* been murdered."

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"Life keeps surprising us," Ehrengraf said.

"And Leona Weybright winds up hoist on her own souffle. The funny thing is that I was right in the first place. Howard *was* afraid of Leona, and evidently he had every reason to be. He'd apparently written her a note, insisting that they stop seeing each other."

Ehrengraf nodded. "The police found the note when they searched her quarters. Of course, she insisted she had never seen it before."

"What else could she say?" Evelyn Throop took another delicate sip of Bénédictine and Ehrengraf's heart thrilled at the sight of her pink tongue against the brim of the tiny glass. "But I don't see how she can expect anyone to believe her. She murdered Howard, didn't she?"

"It would be hard to establish that beyond a reasonable doubt," Ehrengraf said. "The supposition exists. However, Miss Weybright does have an alibi, and it might not be easily shaken. And the only witness to the murder, Mrs. Keppner, is no longer available to give testimony."

"Because Leona killed her."

Ehrengraf nodded. "And that," he said, "very likely *can* be established."

"Because Mrs. Keppner's suicide note was a forgery."

"So it would appear," Ehrengraf said. "An artful forgery, but a forgery nevertheless. And the police seem to have found earlier drafts of that very note in Miss Weybright's desk. One was typed on the very machine at which she prepares her cookbook manuscripts. Others were written with a pen found in her desk, and the ink matched that on the note Mrs. Keppner purportedly left behind. Some of the drafts are in an imitation of the dead woman's handwriting, one in a sort of mongrel cross between the two women's penmanship, and one—evidently she was just trying to get the wording to her liking—was in Miss Weybright's own unmistakable hand. Circumstantial evidence, all of it, but highly suggestive."

"And there was other evidence, wasn't there?"

"Indeed there was. When Mrs. Keppner's body was found, there was a glass on a nearby table, a glass with a residue of water in it. An analysis of the water indicated the presence of a deadly poison, and an autopsy indicated that Mrs. Keppner's death had been caused by ingesting that very substance. The police, combining two and two, concluded not illogically that Mrs. Keppner had drunk a glass of water with the poison in it."

"But that's not how it happened?"

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"Apparently not. Because the autopsy also indicated that the deceased had had a piece of cake not long before she died."

"And the cake was poisoned?"

"I should think it must have been," Ehrengraf said carefully, "because police investigators happened to find a cake with one wedge missing, wrapped securely in aluminum foil and tucked away in Miss Weybright's freezer. And that cake, when thawed and subjected to chemical analysis, proved to have been laced with the very poison which caused the death of poor Mrs. Keppner."

Miss Throop looked thoughtful. "How did Leona try to get out of that one?"

"She denied she ever saw the cake before and insisted she had never baked it."

"And?"

"And it seems to have been prepared precisely according to an original recipe in her present cookbook-in-progress."

"I suppose the book will never be published now."

"On the contrary, I believe the publisher has tripled the initial print order."

Ehrengraf sighed. "As I understand it, the presumption is that Miss Weybright was desperate at the prospect of losing the unfortunate Mr. Bierstadt. She wanted him, and if she couldn't have him alive she wanted him dead. But she didn't want to be punished for his murder, nor did she want to lose out on whatever she stood to gain from his will. By framing you for his murder, she thought she could increase the portion due her. Actually, the language of the will probably would not have facilitated this, but she evidently didn't realize it, any more than she realized that by receiving the paintings she would have the lion's share of the estate. In any event, she must have been obsessed with the idea of killing her lover and seeing her rival pay for the crime."

"How did Mrs. Keppner get into the act?"

"We may never know for certain. Was the housekeeper in on the plot all along? Did she actually fire the fatal shots and then turn into a false witness? Or did Miss Weybright commit the murder and leave Mrs. Keppner to testify against you? *Or* did Mrs. Keppner see what she oughtn't to have seen and then, after lying about you, try her hand at blackmailing Miss Weybright? Whatever the actual circumstances, Miss Weybright realized that Mrs. Keppner represented either an immediate or a potential hazard."

"And so Leona killed her."

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"And had no trouble doing so." One might call it a piece of cake, Ehrengraf forbore to say. "At that point it became worth her while to let Mrs. Keppner play the role of murderess. Perhaps Miss Weybright became acquainted with the nature of the will and the estate itself and realized that she would already be in line to receive the greater portion of the estate, that it was not necessary to frame you. Furthermore, she saw that you were not about to plead guilty to a reduced charge or to attempt a Frankie-and-Johnny defense, as it were. By shunting the blame onto a dead Mrs. Keppner, she forestalled the possibility of a detailed investigation which might have pointed the finger of guilt in her own direction."

"My goodness," Evelyn Throop said. "It's quite extraordinary, isn't it?"

"It is," Ehrengraf agreed.

"And Leona will stand trial?"

"For Mrs. Keppner's murder."

"Will she be convicted?"

"One never knows what a jury will do," Ehrengraf said. "That's one reason I much prefer to spare my own clients the indignity of a trial."

He thought for a moment. "The district attorney might or might not have enough evidence to secure a conviction. Of course, more evidence might come to light between now and the trial. For that matter, evidence in Miss Weybright's favor might turn up."

"If she has the right lawyer."

"An attorney can often make a difference," Ehrengraf allowed. "But I'm afraid the man Miss Weybright has engaged won't do her much good. I suspect she'll wind up convicted of first-degree manslaughter or something of the sort. A few years in confined quarters and she'll have been rehabilitated. Perhaps she'll emerge from the experience with a slew of new recipes."

"Poor Leona," Evelyn Throop said, and shuddered delicately.

"Ah, well," Ehrengraf said. " 'Life is bitter,' as Henley reminds us in a poem. It goes on to say:

" 'Riches won but mock the old, unable years;
Fame's a pearl that hides beneath a sea of tears;
Love must wither, or must live alone and weep.
In the sunshine, through the leaves, across the flowers,
While we slumber, death approaches through the hours. . .
Let me sleep.'

"Riches, fame, love—and yet we seek them, do we not? That will

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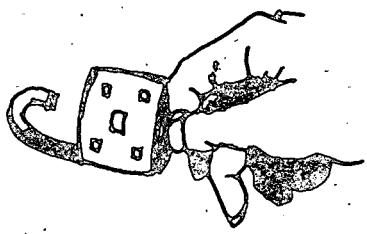
be one hundred thousand dollars, Miss Throop, and— Ah, you have the check all drawn, have you?" He accepted it from her, folded it, and tucked it into a pocket.

"It is rare," he said, "to meet a woman so businesslike and yet so unequivocally feminine. And so attractive."

There was a small silence. Then: "Mr. Ehrengraf? Would you care to see the rest of the house?"

"I'd like that," said Ehrengraf, and smiled his little smile.



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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

FIRST EDITIONS: When Ellery Queen wrote *Queen's Quorum* in 1951, the value of *The Prose Romances of Edgar A. Poe* (first book publication of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue") was $25,000. Now, 31 years later, *The Book Collector's Handbook of Values* by Van Allan Bradley (Putnam) lists it at $25,000–$50,000. It's not surprising that mystery first editions are doubling in value along with many other collectables these days. Other quotes from Bradley's book: Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely,* $2,000; Chesterton's *The Innocence of Father Brown,* $300–$500; Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles,* $2,000; Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet,* $15,000; Post's *Uncle Abner,* $400–$500; Queen's *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes,* $250–$300; Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon,* $2,000–$2,500.

Something unique for collectors is a limited edition of Ross Macdonald's *The Far Side of the Dollar,* priced at $175.00. Each of its 221 numbered copies contains one page of the author's original working draft. It's published by Bruccoli Clark, 2006 Sumter Street, Columbia, SC 29201.

MICHAEL COLLINS: American writer Michael Collins (Dennis Lynds) received unique honors recently from Germany and France. He won the 1981 award of a German organization devoted to crime and mystery writing for his entire body of work. And a French fanzine, *Hard-Boiled Dicks,* devoted an entire issue to articles about Collins, along with an interview, bibliography, and illustrations. The bibliography, partly in English, reveals that Collins ghosted some Shadow novels and 80 of the Mike Shayne novelets published in *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine.* French-speaking readers interested in *Hard-Boiled Dicks* can write to Roger Martin, 1 route d'Halanzy, Piedmont 54350, Mont-Saint-Martin, France. Meanwhile, the newest Collins novel, *Freaks,* will be published in November by Dodd, Mead.

CONTINUING SERIES: It's always good to report new titles in established mystery series. The latest volume of Avenel Suspense

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Classics is *Agatha Christie's Detectives,* reprinting five Christie novels about four of her sleuths: *The Murder at the Vicarage* (Miss Marple), *Dead Man's Folly, Sad Cypress* (both Poirot), *Towards Zero* (Superintendent Battle), and *N Or M?* (Tommy & Tuppence).

The second in the Godine Double Detective series, reprinting two novels by Friedrich Durrenmatt, will appear in January. And International Polygonics will soon reprint some of Margaret Millar's early novels.

MORE FROM NORWAY: Odd Einar Frisvoll writes from Norway to confirm the publication in English of three Sven Elvestad novels, as reported in our last column. He adds an interesting note. Dashiell Hammett reviewed Elvestad's *The Case of Robert Robertson* in the *N.Y. Evening Post* on June 21, 1930, as follows: "Pleasantly cold-blooded, smoothly written, it is easily one of the season's best. Sven Elvestad is said to have written some fifty mystery stories. Here is work for translators." Sadly, 52 years later, the work remains undone.

BOUCHERCON XIII: This year's Bouchercon will be held October 8–10 at the Jack Tar Hotel in San Francisco. Details may be obtained from Don Herron, 537 Jones Street #9207, San Francisco, CA 94102.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Walker & Co. has an especially strong mystery list for fall and winter, with novels by Marian Babson and Alan Hunter, plus a trio of books by writers better known in other fields: magazine publicist Penelope Karagerge's *Murder at Tomorrow* (Nov.) is about deadly doings at a national magazine; San Francisco reporter Julie Smith's *Death Turns a Trick* (Dec.) is about a woman lawyer; and comic-strip writer Max Collins's *The Baby Blue Rip-Off* (Jan.) is a tough suspense story

Coming next spring from Walker is a first novel by Cathleen Jordan, editor of our sister publication, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.* It's a classic puzzler, tentatively titled *The Listening Ear of Night.*

EQMM contributor Brian Garfield is busy with a non-mystery project these days, finishing work on his script for *Legs,* a TV movie about the Radio City Music Hall's Rockettes. It's expected to air in late December.

Van Nostrand Rinehold will publish *Whodunit? A Guide to Crime, Suspense and Spy Fiction* in October. It's edited by H. R. F. Keating. Alzina Stone Dale, author of a 1978 book on Dorothy L. Sayers, has *The Invisible Man: A Biography of G. K. Chesterton* on Eerdmans' fall list. Mary Higgins Clark's fourth novel, *A Cry in the Night,* is coming from Simon & Schuster in September. It's been chosen as a Literary Guild selection and paperback rights have sold to Dell.

The Gold Shield, a first novel by N.Y. homicide detective Marie Castoire and Richard Posner, is coming from Putnam in October. Gregory Mcdonald has a new Fletch novel, *Fletch's Moxie,* due from Warner Books in October. And Bill

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Pronzini's *Case File,* the first collection of his "Nameless" private-eye stories and novelets, is coming from St. Martin's early next year.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

The recent reworking of the classic *Cat People* was a mixed blessing. Director Paul Schrader—who had previously scripted such intelligent, moody mysteries as *The Yakuzi, Obsession,* and *American Gigolo*—attempted frankly to weave a dreamy nightmare about an ancient race of people who can turn themselves into cats, a race whose descendants can still be found in corners of the modern world. The premise is tingling and, while large chunks of the movie are outright lycanthropy, delivering the promise of the title, there are sinister atmospheres and moments of fear to delight the mystery-movie addict.

The setting is New Orleans, with its old districts and strange cemeteries, a town where one imagines (Schrader says) anything is possible. A bewildered girl seeks out a brother she has never seen—he is a denominationless minister living in a bizarre house in the French Quarter. Later the police, following a trail of women he has killed, find his cellar filled with human bones.

But these grotesque shocks do not have the impact of two sequences Schrader lifted from the original 1942 *Cat People*—two of the most memorable moments in mystery cinema. The heroine is scrurrying down shadowy streets, certain (as are we) she is being tracked by an animal released from a zoo. Suddenly we hear a heart-stopping hiss, as of a big cat, but it is only a bus stopping before the girl. In another scene, she is swimming alone at night in the basement pool of her hotel when suddenly the lights go out. Fearsome dark shapes loom in the shifting water, but are only as real as the girl's terror.

These two celebrated scenes made the first *Cat People* something of a landmark film and brought fame to its producer, Val Lewton, a novelist who had been brought to RKO to develop for that studio the same sort of low-budget thrillers proving so successful over at rival Universal. Against head-office opposition, he created a film about a woman who can change herself into a big cat without the audience ever seeing the transformation, and indeed the film casts strong doubts about it. *Cat People,* sold as a horror film, could more properly be classed as

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a psychological thriller with rich trappings of atmosphere and mystery.

The film was among the first to feature a sinister psychiatrist as a character, the urbane Dr. Louis Judd (Tom Conway), probing how, like fog lying in the valleys, does "ancient sin cling to the low places, the depressions in world consciousness." He is treating Irena (Simone Simon), a young woman from Serbia, where certain of her kind can out of jealousy and anger assume dark shapes and kill their lovers. "There is in some cases," explains Judd sagely, "a psychic need to release evil upon the world." Irena's new husband comes to believe she is such a cat woman. But we never truly are shown who it is moving in the shadows. It may well be Irena herself, and no other shape. For *Cat People* and for all his films to follow Lewton provided a naturalistic solution. In a sequel, *Curse of the Cat People* (1944), the ghost of Irena seemingly haunts her husband's second marriage, but it is a psychological rather than a supernatural drama.

Cornell Woolrich provided the murder yarn, which became *Leopard Man* (1943)—in which an unknown killer adds to the deaths blamed on a circus animal on the loose. Among the most satisfying of all the Lewton films is the rarely seen *Seventh Victim* (1943), in which a schoolgirl wanders through New York's Greenwich Village searching for her vanished older sister. (Lewton often explored Woolrich-like motifs, especially loneliness in the city.) She finds her embroiled in a dangerous cult, among whose members are the sinister Dr. Judd (curiously, for he has died at the end of *Cat People*) and other fascinating evil-doers. But even though there are several murders and a corpse is carried through the subway, *Seventh Victim* is a drama of mood so pervasive that the ending—in which two women exchange destinies—is overwhelming.

The emergence of the new *Cat People*, leaving nothing to the imagination, only reminds us how much Val Lewton could achieve with his few but memorable contributions to the mystery genre—films which used only mood and shadow to turn the everyday into terror.

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INTERVIEW: JEFFRY SCOTT (1)

This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

EQMN: Where do we start? When and where did *you* start?

SCOTT: I was born in 1937 at Hackney, London—making me a Cockney, near enough—but I was raised in English-redneck farming country on the seacoast just up the

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road from Thomas Hardy's Wessex and not far from Lorna Doone territory.

EQMN: You seem to think in literary terms.

SCOTT: My father won a short-story contest when he was a boy and went into newspapers from farming. My mother wrote a lot too, and they discussed story lines and styles and, above all, whodunits throughout my childhood. I grew up with Dorothy Sayers, Conan Doyle, H. C. Bailey, Freeman Wills Crofts, and R. Austin Freeman on the bookshelves. As a child, it took me a long time to twig that my parents were talking about fictional and not real people, a confusion I'm delighted to entertain to this day.

My folks never told me that writing wasn't that easy, and fraught with as many rebuffs as those facing a not very pretty hooker with a sensitive nature working a bad convention. There can't be many other trades where you offer the best you've got to total strangers who need feel no compunction about telling you to get lost.

EQMN: And so you went ahead and wrote.

SCOTT: My first published story was written when I was fourteen or fifteen, though I didn't sell it until years later. Funnily enough, it's been anthologized more than anything else I've written and bought by U.S. television.

EQMN: Which story was that?

SCOTT: "Out of the Country," a *very* short-short, running just one page (both sides) in hardcover books. *Edgar Wallace Magazine* published it in Britain around 1963 for five dollars in today's money. Kindly colleagues jeered at me for accepting a pittance ("I don't roll a sheet of paper into the typewriter for less than twenty dollars, old man") but I was pleased to gain credibility at any price. It was taken by Pan Books for an anthology two years later. Universal Television bought it and I believe made it the story line for a series episode. It starred in a Doubleday anthology, *Tales of Unease,* in 1969 and it got dramatized for overseas radio. I'm not a great money man but I've worked out that that little tale has earned more than, for instance, my novel.

EQMN: You're a full-time journalist with the London *Daily Mail.* Were you a journalist straight out of school?

SCOTT: I left school at fifteen, joined the local weekly paper as a trainee, and was fired within a year for terminal dreaminess and unsuitability. Eventually I took the classic route of yokel ne'er-do-wells and joined the Army. After three years I mustered out again as a junior NCO with a War Office character assessment of "keenly imaginative," a British euphemism for "bloody liar, bears watching."

EQMN: Where did you go from there?

SCOTT: After wandering away to Holland and living off the country, I came back and got a job on a city evening/daily paper, then went to Fleet Street. My keenest thrill was being loaned back to the paper that had fired me as a temporary editor—very temporary, one week—(they'd been decimated by

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a flu epidemic) but it did have a sort of Monte Cristo's Return element that was succulent at the time.

I've been around Fleet Street for twenty years now, as TV columnist, entertainments editor, and general-feature writer with some overseas assignments for the *Daily Mail*. I spent eighteen months in the *Mail*'s New York Bureau on East Forty-Second Street in the late Seventies and began a long and fairly requited love affair with the United States. I was made more welcome in my first week in Manhattan than I was in my first month's return to London. And when a lawyer who resented a hack at his heels shouted at me to get out of his expletive-deletive court in Queens in 1978, a minor black official stepped in and said, very politely yet firmly, "Hey, hang on, it's not your court or my court or his court. He stays." I thought then that America, occasional nightmares and infelicities apart, was my sort of place, and I've never changed that view.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

With four Edgar nominations in the last three years, Robert Barnard has established an enviable niche for himself among contemporary writers and scholars of the formal detective story. The 1981 novel *Death in a Cold Climate* (Dell/Scene of the Crime, $2.25), set in Tromsø, Norway, where Barnard is a professor of English, shows this witty author at his best. His prose sparkles, and he constructs a puzzle plot worthy of a student of Agatha Christie.

Though Barnard has thus far shunned the use of series characters, he has come up with several sleuths worth meeting again, in this case sardonic Norwegian Inspector Fagermo. Barnard's latest also has a promising central character.

**** Robert Barnard: *Death by Sheer Torture,* Scribners, $10.95. Scotland Yard's Perry Threthowan, estranged scion of a family of zany eccentrics, is more embarrassed than grieved at the death of his father, a collector of torture machines killed in a strappado while wearing spangled tights. When murder is suspected, Perry must relunctantly join the investigation. Witty and stylish as ever, Barnard may have added still another best-of-year candidate.

**** Peter Lovesey: *The False Inspector Dew,* Pantheon, $12.50. Lovesey's first novel in four years—and first ever without Inspector Cribb—is a delightful historical mystery set on a 1921 Atlantic crossing of the *Mauretania*. It is rich in background de-

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tail, irony, and tricky plotting. Few readers will anticipate all the twists.

*** Dick Francis: *Twice Shy,* Putnam, $13.95. One of the all-time masters of the educational thriller has as his subjects this time computers (major) and Olympic target shooting (minor), along with a racing background less prominent than usual. In a structural experiment, Francis employs two narrators and a gap of several years between the two parts of his story. A simpler plot than usual makes this no better than medium-grade Francis.

*** George V. Higgins: *The Patriot Game,* Knopf, $12.95. As always with Higgins, brilliant dialogue carries the plot, this time involving the I.R.A., Boston politicians and priests, and a convicted killer that some of the characters want released from prison, and others do not. U.S. agent Pete Riordan (not to be confused with another character, Ways and Means Reardon) is the investigator, and Jerry (the Digger) Doherty, from an earlier Higgins novel, *The Digger's Game,* is an important though mostly offstage presence. This is not the best Higgins, but involving as always.

*** Robert Irvine: *Footsteps,* Pinnacle, $2.95. The author, known for his TV-news mysteries (written as by R. R. Irvine), now turns to Lovecraftian supernatural horror. The setting is the Utah ghost town of Genesis, overlooked by a haunted rock called Satan's Seat. Compelling, well crafted, and thoroughly professional story-telling. The door is left open for sequels, and another recent Irvine novel, *The Devil's Breath* (Pinnacle, $2.75), apparently has a similar escape-of-imprisoned-evil theme.

*** Jonathan Ross: *A Rattling of Old Bones,* Scribners, $10.95. This solidly constructed and written British procedural concerns the discovery of a long-dead body in a vacated house. George Rogers, a believable and likeable police detective, must deal with a personal as well as a professional involvement in the case.

*** Elliott Lewis: *Bennett's World,* Pinnacle, $2.95. Involving the search for a skid-row Slasher-like killer in Los Angeles, the fifth novel about unorthodox cop Fred Bennett is long and uneven. There are some good scenes, lines, and characters, though, and strong human interest. It's easy to hear the radio voice of Lewis speaking Bennett's lines.

*** Jay Bennett: *The Executioner,* Avon/Flare, $2.25. This is technically a juvenile mystery, but such is double Edgar-winner Bennett's mastery of his craft that it will hold the attention of adult readers, too. Teenager Bruce Kendall, suffering guilt over the accident that caused a friend's death, faces a much more tangible threat when someone seems determined to take revenge. The whodunit element, which I usually found notably absent in my own early reading of children's mysteries, is here in abundance, though the killer is fairly predictible.

*** Joyce Harrington: *Family Reunion,* St. Martin's, $13.95. As in her short stories, novelist Har-

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rington refuses to repeat herself. This one is a very well written and atmospheric job in a semi-romantic suspense vein with some finishing twists seldom met in a traditional gothic.

Randall Garrett's *Starship Death* (Leisure, $2.50), originally published in 1962 as *Unwise Child*, belongs to a rare sub-genre: the theological science-fiction detective story.

Ringing some interesting changes in Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, and featuring a traditional gathering-of-the-suspects, this tale of space sabotage is well worth reading.

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DETECTIVERSE

PILLOW TALK

by ROSEMARY LAZAROU

Is that blood on the pillow? Yes, darling,
It is, but the stain is quite old.
It was left by a man who betrayed me—
You shiver, my love. Are you cold?

Oh, the man? His throat met a dagger
At midnight. Of *course* he was dead.
But the hour grows late. Stop your pacing.
Put the light out and come to bed.

There's a blonde in a flat up on High Street
Who's known to be more than a flirt.
I've followed you there every Tuesday
For weeks. —Sorry, love. Does it hurt?

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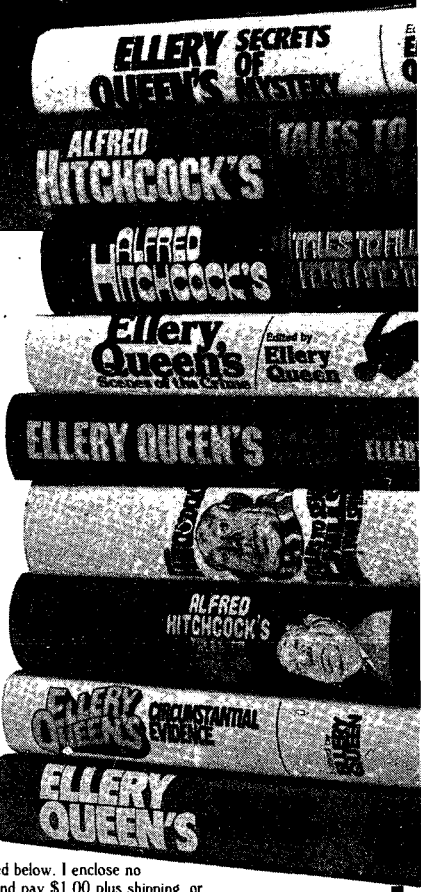

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

"It is its reality, not its drama, wherein lies the core of the interest in murder," William Bolitho wrote in the Introduction to his classic Murder for Profit *(1926). "We have a need for the sight of life and death as for salt. We wage-slaves live continually in incompletion and inexplicability; we strain for a sight of stars and mud; we wish to take our bearings and know where we stand."*

As does our good friend from Pete's Place, through the keenness of Robert Twohy, whose "Mousie" (EQMM, November 4, 1981) was runner-up for MWA's Edgar for best mystery short story of 1981. We're pleased to bring you this latest from Mr. Twohy's exceptionally sensitive imagination, a wonderfully visual story—of vision, and of visions . . .

THE BATHTUB MURDERS

by ROBERT TWOHY

Rose introduced me to her new boy friend—"I wancha to meet Mel Graff."

Thick black hair—

He said, "Have a drink."

"No, I've got to, uh—" What did I have to do? Nothing. But I didn't want to drink with him.

His handshake was all right. So was his smile—but it missed his eyes. Light blue, with an odd shine—watchful eyes. Eyes to remember. I remembered.

"I've got to talk to Mullaney down there about something. Nice meeting you." I scuttled away, losing myself in the cluster of drunks

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at the far end of the bar, ordered a beer and huddled there, wondering if Rose knew anything about this new flame of hers.

She was a good-natured little lady, well liked in the working-class dumps around town. Her hobby was men. She figured you don't have to turn in your player's card just because you've hit a certain age—drop out when you have to, not until.

Which is all to the good, I guess, except with this guy, she might have bumbled into a game where there weren't any rules.

Fifteen years before, 300 miles south—the town of San Vicente, California. I hadn't known him there, had never spoken to him. He used to come in a bar I was drinking at. His thick hair was greying, not yet dyed. A medium-built guy, fit-looking. And he had those eyes.

One idle afternoon it was just Jack the bartender and me, and Jack, who'd been drinking steadily as usual, muttered, "I hear he's picked up with Aggie," and shook his head, meaning bad news.

"Who?"

"Haynes. Guy with the thick hair, blue eyes—you've seen him."

"Oh, him. Yeah. Who's Aggie?"

"Old doll around town." He knocked down his shot, refilled. "He's been in jail twice. A guy told me yesterday."

That seemed to call for a thoughtful look, which I put on.

"Seems he moves in with a woman, cons her out of all he can get, then beats the hell out of her and moves on."

That called for a shake of the head.

"He's only been around town a few months. Seemed like an okay guy—but this guy says both times he went up it was almost for murder."

"Who was the guy?"

"Just somebody got off the bus at the rest stop, ran in for a couple. Haynes was just leaving. Guy said he'd been a jail guard in Colorado—said he reckanized Haynes by his eyes. Could have been bulling me, of course." He knocked down his shot. "Aggie's a good old gal—I'm gonna tell her. Then it'll be hers to deal with how she wants."

A few days later I went in that bar and a new bartender was on. I asked about Jack. He said, "In the hospital—in a coma."

"What happened?"

"Went down the stairs at his rooming house. Late at night, nobody heard—lay there all night."

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He went to serve somebody. When he came back my way I asked, "D'you know Aggie?"

"Old gal around the bars? Sure."

"How is she?"

"Fine, I guess. I haven't seen her in a week or so. Why?"

"Oh, no reason. D'you know Haynes?"

"Who's he?"

"Guy comes in here."

"No." He got the look of a man who wonders why he's being asked questions. He moved away and pretended to do something.

I went out. Never went back.

Reason was that next day I got a letter from a friend telling me of a job driving cab in Lindenvale. So I took the bus north and forgot about Jack, Aggie, and Haynes—until Rose introduced me to Mel Graff and I saw that thick hair and those eyes.

So, I thought, drinking my beer, like Jack had said, the guy off the bus could have been feeding him bull. And Jack could have gone down the stairs with no help from anyone—lushes do that. It was no affair of mine.

But that night I couldn't sleep. "Almost murder." Rose was a good little person. But I could make a fool of myself. The jail guard, if not bulling, could be mistaken. *I* could be mistaken—guys can look like each other.

I got off the couch-bed and went to the bookcase, thinking that if I read a while I'd stop feeling so jumpy—hit on *Murder for Profit,* by a crime essayist of the Twenties, William Bolitho, a book I hadn't read for some years. Went back, lay down, and paged to 'The Self-Help of G. J. Smith.'

Why him, I don't know. There are five real-life murderers in the book—I could have turned to any. But Smith was the one I turned to.

George Joseph Smith. He used other names but that was his real name. He's notable because he thought of a new way, in 1913 or thereabouts, to commit murder. He made some money by it and tried it again. Same result. So he tried it a third time—

I finished the piece and felt drowsy, turned on KAMA, which gives sleep-music twenty-four hours a day, put out the light, closed my eyes, and after a few minutes the music faded and things got fuzzy and

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A bright beach. A tall woman, dark-haired, 35 or more, in a dress like before World War I, standing there, looking out over the sea.

A tough-faced little guy in a neat but tacky-looking suit down the beach, looking at her then strutting up the sand toward her—

Her face in closeup was puffy, with blotches here and there—bony nose, no chin to speak of, round childish mouth, big dark eyes that got bigger as he got closer.

He stopped before he reached her and looked at the sea. She shot him skittery glances and one long buttoned shoe made awkward little scrapings, but she didn't walk away. Watching her, I got the feeling that *she* had the feeling that something might happen that she'd stopped thinking would ever happen.

He murmured something.

I had an urge, like when you get caught up in a scary movie, to yell, "Run! Get *away* from that guy!"

I knew who he was—Smith, of course. And this was nearly seventy years ago and one of those beaches in England he used to prowl. My imagination had conspired up this meeting with one of his brides. (Or maybe some dreams are glimpses we're granted, for some reason, into the past. Isn't there a theory that everything that's happened is still happening somewhere?) Her puffy cheeks, the scared but excited light in her eyes; his hard face, probably shaved clean that morning but looking about ready for another shave—why should I imagine details like those? Why shouldn't I?

She said in a squeaky voice, "Yes, it *is* a beautiful sea."

Now he spoke so I could hear. His accent was factory-grade, but he'd worked on it. He sounded his h's pretty well, and his tone was mellow, with a stroking quality. "Have you been long in Bristol?"

"Several weeks."

"It must be a pleasant way of life."

"Sir?"

"I mean traveling abaht, one resort to another, a young woman with means for a life of leisure. Single, without responsibilities or attachments." He wasn't guessing, he knew what class of woman he was dealing with. "Are you sometimes lonely?" His blue eyes, non-threatening, held her dark ones.

After long moments she broke the connection. Her shoe made those nervous scrapings. "I have to go. They'll be waiting tea at the rooming house." But the shoe didn't take the step that would have carried her away from him.

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"I don't mean to be pers'nal. It's just that the lovely day and the beauty of a young woman—the sight moved me."

Instinct must have told her that from this point things would go on unless she stopped the action now—and maybe she'd better. She turned away, mumbling, "I have to go."

He waited. I did too, willing her to start walking, though knowing she wouldn't, couldn't. She was trapped in a scene that had to be played through.

Maybe they'd never stopped playing it. Maybe on into the infinite they had to go on playing it.

When she turned it was back toward him. She looked out at the sea. "It *is* sometimes lonely."

He took two steps and was beside her. "I know loneliness too. Sometimes I dare speak to another who I sense feels the same." He took her hand, held it like something rare and exquisite, put it to his lips. "Has this ever happened before?"

"My father—when I was little—he sometimes kissed my hand." She closed her eyes, breathing deep. "How silly I sound! How strange I feel!"

"So no man has ever—" In his voice's caress she was nothing and felt nothing but what he wanted her to be and to feel.

Very soft, his lips went to her cheek.

She touched the place of the kiss, looked at him in wonder.

"Sit. On this patch of green." He eased her down, let himself down beside her.

She gave a ragged laugh. "I don't even know your name!"

"Henry Williams. I know yours. Annabelle."

"Bessie. Bessie Mundy."

"Annabelle. Annabelle Lee, from her kingdom by the sea. D'you feel what I do, that we can make a unity together, beautiful Annabelle Lee?"

His lips moved from hers. And she, caught in a boil-up of something she'd not known existed inside her, lunged into him, knocking him over, pushing her face into his neck, crying out, "My savior, my love!"

I saw them there, in that still heap, and wondered, What now?

She got up. The sun had dropped suddenly, the beach was dim, with the sea softly shining.

They came toward me, at first hand-in-hand, then separating, he standing off to the side, she moving into closeup, saying, partly to

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me I think but mostly to herself, "Loneliness is a test to be endured, until we find our reward—mine came to me that day."

She had a soft smile—and damned if that blotchy face wasn't pretty!

I wanted to tell her how pretty she looked—but she was gone. And now Smith, standing back in the shadows, was talking, voice clangy now, no stroking tones.

"You used to find them, in those years before the wars—women not so young, who'd never married, never known men, wanderers, with a little remittance from parents who had no more use for them than anyone else did, from one resort to another, a few weeks here, a few there. Invisible women, looking for nothing, expecting nothing."

He was in closeup now, his tough face a pale glow in the moonlight. "I saw her loneliness but I saw something else—beauty. Others couldn't see it, but I could. I knew how to bring it out. You saw yourself—I made her beautiful." Suddenly he yelled, "What had *they* done to 'er? What would they 'ave gone on doing?"

He laughed, or rather snarled, "That's a joke really, or a riddle. I used her, they didn't. The good, virtuous people didn't—for them she was no use at all!"

The snarl got wild, turned into a whistle and a roar—the 6:11 daily freight that powers through Lindenvale, regularly starting my day. It was daylight, Tuesday, the something-of-April. So I washed, dressed, went out.

The day passed, some bright moments, mostly dumb ones—some laughs, some vexations. I saw Rose and Haynes strolling towards Pete's Place—she didn't see me and I didn't blip the horn. Off and on through the day my mind flashed on tough-faced Smith and Bessie Mundy, who for a while had been Annabelle Lee—and the beauty that had surfaced. Why? Because he'd brought it out, like he'd said?

Nighttime. I shut off the TV, got Bolitho, lay down, and again read the essay on Smith—put the book down, turned on KAMA, closed my eyes, and in a little while

A room. Lots of dark heavy furniture, some stiff-looking landscapes and brownish photos on the walls, a big plant in a corner, a table with a decanter and a wine glass. In a chair near it a small man, sixtyish, reading a newspaper. In another chair a big woman with cold eyes fixed on a magazine.

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The man sipped from the glass. He had a thin red fuddled face. One of the photos was him, chin up, face young and eager, in one of those tight-collar tunics they wore in Victoria's army. So he was a retired army man—and it was England again.

He went suddenly rigid, jerked the paper, then read intently. The woman, after a glance, went back to her reading.

"Listen!" He read, " 'A bride drowned in her bath Friday last, at Blackpool, four days after her marriage. Alice Burnham Smith had been married the preceding Monday to Mr. George J. Smith, a dealer in wares, at the Blackpool registry office. Mr. Smith told officials that on Tuesday his bride had suffered a fainting spell and he had taken her for examination to the local physician, who recommended rest and a light diet. Early Friday afternoon Dr. Billing was summoned by the distraught bridegroom, having discovered his wife's body in the bathtub. The coroner's findings were that Mrs. Smith had been overcome by a fainting spell and had slid under the water and drowned. Services took place Sunday last.' "

A long silence followed, as the man stared at the woman. She looked at her magazine. He got up, shambled a few steps, said in a sharp voice, "Do you remember Bessie, Charlotte?"

She turned those cold eyes on him.

That seemed to snuff out his flash of spirit. He dropped back in his chair, mumbled, "I wish I'd gone to see her after she wrote. I—cared for her, you know. I really did."

He blinked his sad, fuddled eyes. "If I'd gone I'd have met Williams. And I could go now to Blackpool, get a look at this fellow Smith, see if it's him."

She said flatly, "And if it is?"

"If he married two women within a year and both died of fainting spells in their bath—if it's the same man, using different names—then obviously he murdered them!"

Again her look was too much for him. His eyes slid away from it. "Well," he said weakly, "one thing I can do. I can send this item to Scotland Yard with a letter telling how Bessie died. They can check, find out if it's the same man—"

She had got up. She was very big standing. She said, "No. You will not write. Bessie had no excuse."

He whispered, "No excuse?"

"None. She had an education, all the advantages—and what did she do? Threw herself at a cheap peddler she met on the beach and married him only a few days later." Her lips twisted. "Then writing

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us, saying that if we chose not to meet him, if we didn't approve, she was sorry but he'd given her the only joy she'd ever known."

He nodded, looked off. "Yes. She wrote that."

Her voice got loud, harsh. "Then within a week the news of her death in the paper, what she'd been up to clear to everyone—a tawdry courtship, marriage before a dreary little clerk! I kept my head high but—"

Her eyes shot around. "Oh, I could see it, the sly look when they came with condolences. I knew what they were thinking!" She drew herself up, shot out her strong chin. "I won't have it start up again. Stories in the papers, police coming, interviews, a trial—Bessie, *murdered* in that bathtub! Humiliating enough to drown in it, but *murdered?* I won't have it! I won't let you write Scotland Yard!"

He tried, feebly. "There could be others, other lonely women—"

"I'll hear no more. The matter is closed."

The light softened, they sat there in dimness. I heard his voice, or his thoughts. "Closed. For her, not for me. I'll have it inside me, what I should do, and dare not." His sad eyes turned to me and his lips moved—but whatever he said got lost in the clash and jangle of the 6:11.

Wednesday passed. I did this and that, and late in the day I stopped at the Moonduster. At the bar was Rose, alone, in a new powder-blue suit-dress, looking as pretty as I'd ever seen her. She beamed, asked me to sit, and I did. I asked, "Where's your friend?"

"He went out for something."

I heard myself saying, "He reminds me of someone."

"Does he?"

"A man named Haynes." Why was I opening up? Was it my business who she went with? She'd got along all her life without advice from me but my voice ran on. "He'd been in jail in Colorado for—"

But I was talking to the neat brown curls at the back of her neck. I looked past her—Haynes was coming in the door.

He walked to her and put something wrapped in green tissue in front of her and his lips went to her cheek, very light. She smiled and pulled the paper off the present. It was a little plant in a pot. She made a happy sound. "It's sweet!" Turned to me and asked if it wasn't.

I said it was.

Haynes smiled with his lips, and watched me.

I said, "Hi. We met the other day."

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"Sure. Have a drink."

"Thanks, but I have to meet somebody." I got up.

Rose said, "You were saying—what was it? You used to know Mel?"

"No, I said he reminded me of someone." He took in whatever my face showed.

"Wayne, wasn't it?" said Rose. "Something like that—Wayne, Caine?"

"I forget, it was a long time ago." I gave her shoulder a touch, bobbed my head at him, and moved fast to the door—feeling sick of myself, as I often do. What was I afraid of? That he'd come to my place late at night and throw me down the stairs because I knew who he was?

Did I? I asked myself that as I sat at the bar of the Frigate, a stylish dump up the avenue where nobody I know goes. And answered that of course I didn't. A guy with thick dyed hair and pale-blue eyes reminded me of someone. A drunk bartender had told me something, then pitched down some stairs. Big deal. Guys look alike, lushes tumble, and those dreams had come horning in and screwed up my thinking. Didn't I have enough real problems to worry about? Let this be the end of it. To hell with William Bolitho and I'll have another margarita, make it a double please, thank you.

I felt my way home and it was late. I stumbled on *Murder for Profit* by the couch-bed, threw it aside, hit the horizontal, things got grey and quiet, then I heard a thin dry voice.

"The defendant may speak."

A soupy mist. In it was Smith, not seen clearly but it was him all right, in the same tacky suit, bedraggled now, stains here and there. He spoke in that clangy voice, "No evidence!"

The voice sounded, "Three women, all apparently fainting, all drowning in their bath, all deaths occurring within a few days of marriage to you. In each instance insurance had been placed on the deceased. In each instance you removed yourself from the scene as soon as monies were paid. In each instance you'd married under a different name."

"The second time I used my right name—Smith." From the mist came a rustle of laughter.

The dry voice asked, "Are you making a confession?"

"Nothing to confess. No evidence! Three drowned women—that's all you have. Strange, yes, I admit it's strange. But some men have bad luck."

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He shouted into the rustle, "No! Stop it! I'm not being funny! A strange fate happened to me. Each time I was downstairs in the cottage we'd rented and then I'd rush upstairs—"

"Why?"

"Why? Well I'd feel all of a sudden nervous, like something was—happening, and I'd rush upstairs and see 'er there and then I'd rush outside for help."

"Having made no effort to revive her."

"She was dead! I knew she was dead!"

"Yes, I daresay you did."

Smith stood still, shoulders hunched, until the rustle faded away. Then: "You all talk about laws of probability. What are they? Are they evidence? I thought English law was based on evidence!" He stumped around, rubbing his sweaty face. "Tell me this! How'd I do it? If you can't describe it, 'ow I did it, you 'ave no case—and I shouldn't be 'ere at all!"

The voice said, "Have you anything more to say?"

"I didn't kill 'em. And you can never prove I did." A plain chair was near—he slumped into it.

Silence for a while. Then he raised his head, looked toward me, and said dully, "How could I defend myself? I couldn't without saying, 'Yes, I did it—and I had a right!' " He jumped up. "I took and used what they didn't want! And they act like it mattered! Like they cared!"

He bawled into the mist, "Hypocrites! Righteous pigs! They were nothing to you, till they were dead meat!"

He stood a minute, chest heaving, gradually got himself together, and said in a low voice, "I'm different parts. I could give beauty, that's one part of me—but there's another part." His look got almost wistful. He whispered, "I wanted to be respectable."

I laughed out loud, heard my laugh. He shouted, "Yes! That's what I wanted! To have standing, pay my bills, taxes! A bank account, decent possessions, merchants nodding, 'Good morning, Mr. Smith,' neighbors smiling, talking to me abaht neighborhood things. Only if you're one of their fat circle can you be safe!"

He turned as a bathtub came floating through the mist, a battered tin tub which settled with a soft *thunk* off behind him, then turned back to me. "I wanted safety inside that greasy circle of pigs and I used what attracted me. Lonely women—"

A woman came through the mist in a blue robe. She had a long

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face and fair hair, resembling Bessie Mundy but not her. She stood a moment by the tub, then slid off the robe, which fell at her feet.

Smith's voice rushed on. "I was doing a job, it was what I could do. I'd go out and buy a tub and it'd be a cheap tub, why not? I'd set it up and fill it and then she, smiling 'cause she knew she was beautiful—I'd given her that, you can see she's beautiful—stepping in the tub, letting 'erself down."

Crouching, he moved toward her. Through the mist I saw her looking up at him, smiling. "She made little remarks and I answered, I suppose, I don't know, my mind was on what I was doing—a job, a thing to be done. And I made a quick move, took 'er ankles—" I watched him do it "—pulled up and up, she going under, me 'olding 'er legs up, she scrabbling but couldn't find the edges, couldn't get 'er shoulders up, 'er 'ead up."

He turned from the tub, rubbing his wet hands on his jacket. "Without me, what? Thirty years more of death-walking? I know one thing—I gave 'er and the others what nobody else ever 'ad! I gave 'em beauty!

"And after that, I did 'em a favor! So go ahead—do a favor for me!"

Then he was gone and the tub was gone. I heard a whistle and a roar, and the mist blew away, and my eyes were open. I was staring at the apartment wall and it was Thursday.

Were they finished now, I wondered, the visions or the dreams? The three brides were drowned and he was hanged. What more was to be seen? Anything? Nothing?

I stopped at Walgreen's for cigarettes. In the checkout line a voice behind me said, "Morning." I knew the voice. I glanced, murmured recognition.

I walked out toward my cab fast, but not fast enough. I started to get in and he was six feet from me, his pale eyes steady on mine. "What are you scared of?"

"What d'you mean?" I rubbed my face. "I have a hangover. I guess I look—"

"Is it me?"

I laughed, like something was funny, and got in the cab. "Why would I be scared of you?"

"You told Rose I remind you of someone. Wayne—was that the name? Who's Wayne?"

"Nobody. Look, I've got to go on a run. See you around." I backed off, drove away. In the mirror I saw him watching.

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The day ended. I stayed out of the bars and went home—I was tired from last night's boozing. I didn't want to think, *or* dream. Maybe if I changed my pattern, slept now, I'd sleep in peace. Then be awake by midnight, eat something, then read through the rest of the night. Not Bolitho, no more Bolitho—Marcus Aurelius maybe, who's concerned with the good part of humankind.

I closed my eyes and felt myself slipping off. It was nothing for a while, very restful nothing, and then there was thick swirling and it was that same damned mist. I wanted to pull myself out of it but couldn't—I was bound to watch it, I knew I was bound to watch it, and so I did.

A spot of blue coming toward me. The blue robe—the fair-haired woman of last night. She saw me and smiled. Her eyes were bright and her long face if not beautiful was good to see.

From behind her came a small figure in a shabby brown uniform. On the shoulders were insignia. I don't know Victorian army hardware but somehow I knew these designated a major. So the young officer from the photo had achieved the rank of major before retirement. Not the eager young face but the thin red drinker's face was above the tight collar. The mothy old tunic fit him not badly.

He said, "Bessie?"

The woman turned to him. The glad look slid from his face. "Sorry. I thought you were— But don't I recognize you? From the newspaper photograph? Aren't you the third bride—what was your name? Marian?"

"Margaret. Margaret Lloyd."

"Of course. I remember. He used the name Lloyd when he married you."

She said, "You might have stopped him. If you'd written Scotland Yard."

A big man came out of the mist—neat overcoat, a dark hat square on his head. He had a black mustache, a broad calm face. His voice was a pleasant rumble. "Excuse me, Miss—had to be three. Two might have been passed off as just strange coincidence. But three—too many by one. Three brides, three drownings—no way for coincidence. When your passing was brought to our attention—"

"You were a detective?"

He touched his mustache. "James Hoade, Inspector, Scotland Yard. If I may say, you look—considerably well."

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She smiled acknowledgment.

The Major said toward me, "I'd been reading the crime news carefully. I suppose I knew it'd happen again. And when I read of this woman drowning, at Bath—"

"Ironic, that." The Inspector looked thoughtful.

"When I read of it, I wasn't surprised."

Bessie's mother came through the mist, dressed as before. The Major said, "Hello. Have you seen Bessie?"

She said flatly, "No."

He asked the Inspector, "Have you? Bessie Mundy, my daughter—the first bride."

"No sir. Is she here?"

"I don't know." The Major turned, looked into the mist.

Margaret said, "Why didn't you write Scotland Yard?"

He looked at her. Then his gaze slid away, and the edge of it caught something—a decoration on his chest. His hand came up and touched it. He got a look of puzzlement. "Do you know," he murmured, "that's an award for bravery?" He shook his head, like there was a lot about himself and the life he'd had that he didn't understand.

The Inspector said to Margaret, "After your passing, we received a number of letters pointing out that a surprising lot of brides seemed to be expiring in their baths."

She nodded, but her eyes stayed on the Major. She said again, "Why didn't you write?"

His sad eyes met hers. "Because I was afraid. My wife had a strong character, I had no character. She had money, standing, a wish to be respectable—I had no money, no wishes except for comfort and ease. Also, I drank. So she dominated me. It wasn't her fault, it was the way it was."

Charlotte said, "Why do you babble on?"

"This lady wanted to know why I neglected to save her life."

The Inspector coughed. "Like I said, sir, it had to be three—"

"Three to make a case, I suppose. But if I'd written the letter, told how the second death matched Bessie's, you'd have got onto him. He'd have taken warning, not tried it again."

"Then I'd have been saved." Margaret gave a low laugh.

The Major asked, "Would you have wanted that?"

"I'd stopped wanting anything long before. Then *he* came—"

Charlotte tugged the Inspector's sleeve. "Look at her—she's smiling! What do they see in a creature like that? With his dreadful,

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obvious lies!" She snapped at Margaret, "Couldn't you see through him?"

"Of course."

"But you wanted to give of yourself!" It was a sneer.

Margaret said quietly, "Yes."

The Major asked, "Did he give to you?" She nodded. "What did he give?"

"Attention, kindness, passion. I thought it was love. I don't know how love could be different."

"But after that?"

"Yes. But I had seven days of what I took and gave back as love."

The Major's gaze drifted to the Inspector. "Did you ever know love?"

The Inspector coughed. "Over my head, sir. Was happily married, within reason. Assumed it was love, as they say."

Charlotte cried, "Love, love—I'm sick of this! It's so stupid!" She whirled to Margaret. "How wretched to remember your last moments as being hauled by the heels, blubbing for breath in a cheap tin bathtub! How completely ignominious! No excuse, no excuse whatever!" She stamped off into the mist.

"You, Inspector?" asked the Major.

"Sir?"

"Any regrets for your life?"

"Missed a good deal of fun I'm sure, but did my duty. Raised five tads—did as well as could be expected, I hope." He nodded to the Major, touched his mustache to Margaret, and strolled away.

The Major asked, "Well, Margaret? Will you have ignominious memories?"

"I'll remember when I saw love in a man's eyes."

"Or what you took as love."

"Took and gave back." She smiled, and was gone into the mist.

He gazed after her—stood a while like that. I heard him murmur, "Bessie's not coming."

He turned back to me. "Such an easy thing, I see now—just tell Charlotte, respectable be damned, and write the letter. And no good saying that by slacking it Margaret found seven days' joy. I had a thing to do, clear-cut, and funked it."

I heard a faint whistle. He looked off. "Is that the train? Comes fast, doesn't it?" The whistle had turned into a clang, a crash, a roar. He stood watching as a baleful black shadow came tearing through the mist.

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I yelled, "Jump clear!"

He didn't move except to turn his face to me. "Remember the future," he called. "Plan for your future while there's time!"

The roar and the blackness filled my head, then was gone. I was awake in the dim apartment.

I sat up. Could I have slept all night? Was it 6:11? No—there was no train noise now. I heard street sounds, stereo music from somewhere in the building, someone laughing. The train had been in my head, part of the dream. I went to look at the clock on the stove. It was 8:27. I'd been asleep only about two hours.

I got up, went in the bathroom, doused my face, and looked at myself, not much liking the sight, but that was it, what I had to operate with. I tightened some of the slack in my jaw, combed my hair, and went out.

Pete's Place was almost empty. The Moonduster had a crowd but not who I was looking for.

I walked half a block to Hobart and saw lights in Rose's apartment on the corner, over the carports. Approaching, I thought, he's probably with her. Why not? He's moved in by now and after a while he'll grab what he can, beat her senseless or worse, then move on. If anyone interferes he'll throw him down some stairs.

I moved slower. Down the street came a police car. A block and a half up is the police station. I know a good cop there, Lt. Birkell. If I went to him and laid it out—

Fifteen years ago, 300 miles away. The name of the bar I didn't remember—probably long phased out anyway. Aggie and Jack moved, dead, forgotten? What could Birkell do? Something, maybe—find out what he could. But it wasn't his thing to take on. The Major had come to me, not Birkell.

"Plan for your future," he'd said. I was walking along the deck over the carports to the corner apartment. Reaching the door, I knocked.

Rose's voice said, "Who?"

I said my name.

The door opened. She looked surprised. I was a barroom pal, no more. "What brings *you* here?"

"I wanted to talk to you about something."

"Oh? Come on in." She gave me room.

I went in. Across the neat little living room was Haynes, on a couch, those pale eyes fixed on me.

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"Sit down," said Rose.

I sat in a chair near the door, which she had closed.

She hovered. "What was it?"

I was sorting through ways to start, with him watching me.

He said, "Is this private?"

"No. It's about you." So I had my start. "I saw you fifteen years ago, in San Vicente. You'd been in jail in Colorado. You were starting up with a woman named Aggie." I heard my voice—it was clear, steady. "Such an easy thing, I see now," the Major had said. The hardest thing about something you don't want to do is getting yourself in a state of mind to do it. "A bartender named Jack told her that you had a thing about robbing and smashing up women—you threw him down a flight of stairs. He probably died."

He looked at me with no particular expression. Rose gave a sort of amazed snort, started to sputter.

He held up a hand at her, said quietly to me, "The guy I remind you of—Wayne, was it?"

"Haynes. You're him."

He got up. I got ready to move. He said, "Fifteen years ago?"

"About then."

He walked away, to the bedroom.

Rose let out a spill of laughter. "Are you completely nuts?"

"No. What's he getting?" I got up.

He came back with a pistol.

I stared at it lying across his hand, not pointing at me.

"You think I've killed someone—You're right. In the war, and after. No women—three men. But not by throwing them downstairs. With this." He hefted the pistol. "D'you know guns?"

"No."

"It's a .38."

He stepped back, laid it on a table. Under his arm, which I hadn't noticed, was a big black album. He held it out to me.

I opened it, sat down on the edge of the chair. It was a scrapbook, memories of a guy's career. The career was in a city in New Jersey. Photos, clippings, letters, notices, awards. It began in the Forties, postwar. The guy was in uniform, a raw-boned young roughneck—Melvin J. Graff. He got smoother-looking in his uniform as time passed. By the mid-sixties he had a bunch of stripes and testimonials as chief of police. The last item in the book was a newspaper spread about his retirement in 1977. All the photos

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showed the thick hair, gradually greying, then going black again, and the pale eyes.

He was standing watching me. I closed the book and handed it to him.

"Well," I said.

Rose said, "You must feel pretty foolish."

Graff said, "You shouldn't."

He put the book by the pistol. "You mistook me for someone. Easy to do. And you said what you thought you should. Thanks."

Rose squeaked, "You're *thanking* him?"

He grinned at her. The grin reached his eyes. I saw he was really fond of this feisty little woman. "I'm thanking him. You should too."

"*I* should!" She stared, then shrugged. "Okay, if you say so. I don't understand but okay, thanks."

Graff put out his hand to me. I took it. Rose put out her hand. We had a three-cornered handhold.

Rose said, "Now we'll have a drink."

It seemed to suit the moment.

I said, "I'd like to make a toast. To Major Mundy."

"Who's he?" Rose asked.

"A guy who didn't have much character—but he showed me something."

She said, "Okay. To the Major."

"To the Major," said Graff.

He gave me a smile that almost touched his eyes.

We drank to the Major.

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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICIA MOYES

"The only promising prospects left were politicians and diplomats" . . .

THE HONEST BLACKMAILER

by ***PATRICIA MOYES***

Any young man starting out in life to be a serious blackmailer should realize that he is entering a very delicate and possibly dangerous profession, requiring great judgment, finesse, and knowledge of human nature. Above all, he must learn not to be greedy. If Harry Bessemer had not been greedy, he might still be pursuing his lucrative career in London.

Harry came to his chosen profession in a conventional, almost classic way. His parents were blunt, North country, lower middle-class people, and they were proud, in a way, when Harry—after an adequate but not brilliant school career—informed them that he intended to go to London. Shows the lad has spunk, independence. They were even more pleased when he wrote to tell them that he had been accepted by the Metropolitan Police as a trainee. A right good start for the boy—shows you what he's made of. End up Chief Inspector, I wouldn't wonder.

In fact, Harry did not enjoy his years on the Force—for his taste, the work was too hard, the hours too long and the pay inadequate. However, it provided him with precious experience and training, so that when he resigned from the police he had no difficulty in getting a job as an investigator for a highly reputable firm of private detectives.

At the beginning there was a lot of tedious legwork on divorce cases—British law in those days still demanded the kind of sordid

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evidence that only a hired detective could produce. However, he worked doggedly and well, and in time was promoted to more sensitive and interesting cases, involving important and wealthy clients who for one reason or another did not care to call in the law. What he discovered on those cases—the vulnerability of human beings, however exalted—finally decided him to become a blackmailer.

It was, of course, vital that he should lay hands on and keep the tangible evidence that he was sent out to locate—letters, photographs, and even tapes, although he never found them very satisfactory. He would report back to his firm that he had had no success in finding the required evidence. The client might go away happily, convinced that the incriminating document no longer existed; on the other hand, the client might decide to call in another firm of private detectives, and it was imperative that they, too, should find nothing.

There remained the question of where to store these valuable documents until he was ready to use them. Harry moved from the small suburban house which he was renting to another, similar one on the other side of London, which he rented under an assumed name. Here, in the cellar, he installed an efficient safe, a photocopier, and basic darkroom equipment for developing and printing photographs. When he had a sizable collection of potentially damaging evidence in his hands, he resigned from his job as investigator and set up privately as a professional blackmailer.

It is a moot point whether a career blackmailer should marry or remain single. A wife may provide a useful cloak of respectability—on the other hand, it admits another person into that very private world. Harry made a nice compromise. With his savings, together with the small legacy left by his parents, he bought a small dry-cleaning establishment in yet another London suburb, which included living accommodations over the shop. He then married a nice, pretty but not very bright girl named Susan. She ran the shop and did a fair amount of perfectly legitimate business.

Susan had no knowledge of the rented house in the distant suburb, and she genuinely believed that Harry's fairly frequent absences from home were connected with some vague real-estate business up North. This, in her simple mind, accounted for the comparative affluence in which she and her husband lived, which could hardly have been produced by the small dry-cleaning establishment.

Harry knew very well that one of the big difficulties a blackmailer has to overcome is the actual transfer of money from the blackmailee, without any obvious contact between himself and his victim,

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and, of course, without any written or bank records. His terms, which were reasonable, were strictly cash; and for this, the dry-cleaning shop provided an ingenious front. He bought a van with the name—Clean-U-Quik—painted on the side of it. He himself drove the van to make special pickups and deliveries, exclusively to the homes of his various victims.

Posing as a mere driver, in the employment of Clean-U-Quik, he identified himself by a different and assumed name to each of his prospects. The system was simple. He made a weekly or fortnightly call, the victim's clothes were actually cleaned and returned, and there was always an envelope—ostensibly with a check for the cleaning bill—left for Harry to pick up. It contained the required sum in cash. Thus, if his clients were rich enough (and most of them were) to employ a domestic staff, the latter had no suspicion of what was going on. Harry felt justifiably proud of his scheme.

For some years all went well. Then Harry became aware of a growing worry about the permissiveness of modern London society. He soon realized that actors and actresses, rich though they might be, were useless prospects. They would merely laugh in his face, having probably already sold the scandalous story to a newspaper for a large amount of money. Even the aristocracy had become, by Harry's strict standards, notoriously lax, and were only of any practical use if they were closely connected in some way with the royal family. Income-tax dodgers were still a possibility, but unfortunately the Inland Revenue Service was becoming altogether too efficient at catching its own offenders. Homosexuality was no longer a crime, and eminent people were jostling each other to get out of the closet. About the only promising prospects left were politicians and diplomats. What with all this, and inflation too, the life of an honest blackmailer was becoming more difficult by the day.

One of Harry's good, solid clients who never let him down was the Right Honourable Mr.—better call him X. Mr. X was a Member of Parliament, Under-Secretary of State for something or other, eminently respectable, married to a rich and aristocratic wife, and known for his implacable stand against the Provisional I.R.A. in Northern Ireland. Harry had acquired beautiful evidence—both photographs and letters—to show that Mr. X in fact enjoyed a homosexual relationship with a young Irishman, whom he kept in a discreet apartment on the fringes of Islington, in East London, well away from his stylish West London house in Kensington. What was more, the young Irishman was strongly suspected of having illegal

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connections with Ulster terrorists. It was, from Harry's point of view, an ideal setup.

What was even more, a sense of confidence—you could almost call it friendship—sprang up between Harry and Mr. X. Harry's fortnightly demand was a perfectly reasonable sum to pay for his discretion, and he did not abuse it. Moreover, he made a special point of seeing that Mr. and Mrs. X's clothes were impeccably cleaned and pressed. The arrangement would have gone along very satisfactorily for a long time if Harry had not become greedy.

The unfortunate fact was that, in a single week, Harry lost two steady clients. One was a bestselling writer of tough, macho novels who suddenly burst into print with details of his love affair with a private in the Royal Marines. This doubled his sales, and rendered Harry's compromising photograph worthless. The other was a Member of Parliament—a tax-evasion case which the authorities had not spotted, but Harry had—who was blown up when he opened one of the letterbombs which Irish terrorists had taken to sending to politicians known to oppose their views.

This double blow to Harry's finances made him take a drastic step. He wrote a letter to the Rt. Hon. Mr. X., addressed to the House of Commons and purporting to come from one of Mr. X's constituents. It requested an urgent interview with the Member concerning rates and taxes in the constituency. Every British voter has the right to speak to his M.P. on such questions, and private rooms in the House are set aside for such meetings. It was in this way that Harry had made his original contact with Mr. X, and of course he signed the letter with the name by which Mr. X knew him. By return of post Harry received a letter from Mr. X's secretary, granting him an interview the following week.

The Right Honourable Mr. X was not a fool. He had a shrewd suspicion of what was coming, and he was right. In the privacy of the interview room Harry told him bluntly that the fortnightly bills for dry-cleaning were to be trebled, starting from the next pickup day, at the end of the week.

Mr. X smiled, as he always did. He agreed with Harry that these were inflationary times, and that an increase was only to be expected. Harry was momentarily taken aback, feeling that he had trodden on a stair which was not there. He had expected at least a show of opposition.

"There's just one snag, though," Mr. X went on. "The banks are

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closed for today, and I'm off to Belgium for that NATO conference tomorrow morning. Would you take a check?"

"You know my terms," said Harry, smelling a rat. "Cash only."

"Well . . ." Mr. X sighed. "I don't see how it can be done. If you'd wait until next month—"

"I said this week and I mean this week," said Harry, who had financial troubles of his own.

A sudden light broke upon Mr. X. "I know," he said. "There are banks at London Airport which will be open tomorrow before I have to board my plane. I'll draw the money there and send it to you."

"Send it?"

"By post. If you'll just give me your address—"

"Oh, no," said Harry. "I don't want cash like that arriving at the shop."

"Then perhaps you have another address—a private one?"

"You don't catch me like that," said Harry. "I pick the money up at your house—in cash."

"Oh, Harry," said Mr. X, full of regret, "don't you see I'm trying to help you? After all, we trust each other, don't we?"

"Up to a point," said Harry cautiously.

"Ah, well now, how's this for an idea? I'll mail the money from London Airport in an envelope addressed to myself, at my home. I'll have to disguise my handwriting, of course, but that won't be too difficult. I'll mark the envelope Private and Confidential, and I'll underline the word Private three times. That way, you'll be able to recognize it at once."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, while I'm away, my mail will be waiting for me on the marble table in the hall. You know the one. When the butler goes off to collect the clothes for cleaning, you can just pick up the envelope and slip it in your pocket. How's that?"

"Not bad," said Harry, nodding slowly. "Not bad." He smiled. "It's a real pleasure to do business with you, sir. You're a real gentleman."

That evening Mr. X said to his young Irish boy friend, "You know, Paddy, I think it might not be a bad idea if I got one of those letter bombs."

"But—"

"Oh, don't worry. I'll be able to identify it, and take it straight to the police. But there are rumors going round that perhaps I'm not so unsympathetic to the provisionals as I appear to be—"

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"Okay," said Paddy, who was a practical young man. "What do you want?"

"It must be posted tomorrow morning at London Airport," said Mr. X.

"Hey, that doesn't give me much time—"

"You can arrange it," said Mr. X.

"Well—yes, okay. I suppose I can."

"I'll address the envelope myself. Get me one—not too small."

"Yes, *sir,*" said Paddy, with an impish grin and a mock salute. He brought a large envelope.

Mr. X began writing, in apparently uneducated capital letters, his own name and address. He added Private and Confidential in the top left-hand corner and underlined the word Private three times. Then he handed the envelope to Paddy. "Make sure the device is well-padded with newspaper or something," he said. "It should look as though the envelope was pretty full. Got it? All clear?"

"Yes, *sir,*" said Paddy again. He took the envelope. "I'll be getting around to the boys to get this done right away."

"You're a good lad," said Mr. X.

Three days later Harry turned up in his dry-cleaning van at the Kensington house, as usual. As usual, the butler asked him to wait in the hall while he went to get the dirty clothes. It was a great trial to the butler, who had been trained in a grand house, that the mews cottage at the back had been sold for an enormous sum, so that tradesmen had to be admitted through the front door.

As soon as the butler had gone, Harry went to the hall table. Sure enough, there was the envelope, well-stuffed, written in a hand which, from long experience, he could recognize was that of the Right Honourable Mr. X., thinly disguised. He picked up the envelope and put it in his pocket, just as the butler returned with his laundry bag.

"I'll have these back by Tuesday," said Harry cheerfully, as he went out the front door. He could hardly have been more wrong. As soon as he got into the van, he could not resist opening the envelope. He, the van, the clothes, and part of Mr. X's front steps were blown to smithereens.

Harry had made another grave error, as great as his sin of greed. He had not bothered to check that there was no conference in Belgium that week. The Right Honourable, who had simply gone to stay for a few days with his sister in the country, came back to London at once when he heard the news, expressing profound shock and surprise.

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The police were efficient—they were becoming accustomed to dealing with such incidents. They found a few fragments of the envelope, and the butler affirmed that he had noticed, after the explosion, that an envelope marked Private and Confidential, which had been on the table awaiting Mr. X's return, had disappeared. He could only conclude that the dry-cleaning man had taken it—either to steal it, but more likely in mistake for an exactly similar one which was still there, marked Clean-U-Quik, and containing Mr. X's check for three pounds and thirty pence for cleaning, as per invoice.

Since poor Harry was dead, the police decided to give him the benefit of the doubt, and concluded that it had been an error on his part to take the wrong envelope. They congratulated Mr. X on his fortunate escape.

The terrorists, however, took a different point of view. Paddy stood a lot higher in the organization than Mr. X had ever realized, and he began to be worried. If the rumors that Mr. X was playing a double game were so prevalent that Mr. X had actually suggested an apparent letter-bomb attack on himself, then Mr. X ceased to be an asset and became a positive danger. The Right Honourable Mr. X, having disposed of Harry, was in a light-hearted mood—even possibly in a state of grace—when he opened an innocuous-looking letter in his mail at the House of Commons a couple of weeks later, and had his head blown off. So a rough sort of justice may be said to have been done.

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MURDER MYSTERY

by ROSS H. SPENCER

The old Duke of Dewhurst was found very dead
With a small bullet hole in the back of his head
And half of his brain quite destroyed by lead.
It was awful.
The body was cold and the killer was gone
And Scotland Yard came with the first streaks of dawn
For murder in England is not smiled upon.
It's unlawful.

Detectives took pictures and poked here and there.
They picked up loose buttons and stray bits of hair.
They examined for fingerprints everywhere.
They took hours.
The garden was basking in afternoon sun
And the lengthy inspection was just about done
When Sergeant McVickers discovered a gun
In the flowers.

A thirty-eight-caliber Krakenzekrust,
Its once gleaming surface enveloped in rust,
Lodged in a rosebush 'midst buds, thorns, and dust
In the sunlight.
Its barrel was on an approximate line
With the door to the room where precisely at nine
The Duke would relax with his writings and wine
On a warm night.

It was minus one shell and a Scotland Yard test
Proved things to be as McVickers had guessed:
It had taken the Duke to his permanent rest
And vacation.

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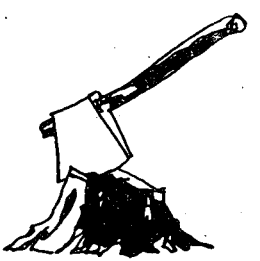
A fidgety butler related that day
How one night in April, or possibly May,
The old Duke had thrown the revolver away
In vexation.

The Duke said the damned thing had never shot straight,
And with one angry motion he'd sealed his own fate
When he'd lofted the weapon over the gate
To the garden.
The rosebush in question had outlived its peak;
Its flowers were shrinking, its future was bleak
For the Duke had decreed it be dug out next week
Without pardon.

McVickers said, "Gentlemen, you will agree
This is no run-of-the-mill mystery,
But I'll take up your time with my own theory
If you're willing.
The Duke's door was open when he sat down to write
And the rosebush had twined round the trigger so tight
That its thorny grip discharged the gun in the night;
Hence the killing.

"This just may be murder and murder will out
But the rosebush was frightened beyond any doubt
For it sensed its own peril—it would be dug out,
So to perish.
The puzzle is solved but my own problem grows
For every fellow at Scotland Yard knows
If I arrest any flower it won't be a rose.
These I cherish."



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a *NEW* short story by

JOHN LUTZ

Does anyone reading this issue remember an early Frank Sinatra movie titled Higher and Higher? *Well, this is different . . .*

DEEPER AND DEEPER

by JOHN LUTZ

I'm cold, and I'll never be warm again. Each wave is higher than the one before. And I was the daughter always unfairly referred to as vain, greedy, and "shallow."

Mother was the first to tell me: "Maudie, it ain't your fault, but the piece of you that lets you know right from wrong is missing."

If that's true, that it *wasn't* my fault, then I don't deserve this. I mean, crime is mostly in the intent—that's where right and wrong come in—and I wasn't thinking about being right or wrong when I planned on killing Graham. I was thinking only about being rich. But here I am, in my Gucci velour bathing suit, wrapped up in a sheet tight as a mummy. I can't twitch so much as a muscle.

Larry did this to me—he tied me out of sight here, to the base of the pier at Graham's private boat dock. When the tide rises enough, I'll drown. By now Larry's in his car halfway to Miami. When the authorities determine the time of my death he'll have an alibi. He'll have been in another part of the state with friends. Tomorrow morning when the tide's out again he'll drive back here, untie and unwind me, and let me be discovered washed up on the beach, unmarked and dead, my hair a mess. Accidental drowning will be the verdict. Nobody'll connect Larry and me.

Larry doesn't know right from wrong either. But he knows smart from dumb.

It doesn't do any good to scream. This is a private, desolate stretch

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of beach, and the roar of the surf is so loud if anyone did hear me they'd probably think it was a gull.

A particularly large wave swells in the moonlight and rolls toward me, rising higher and breaking out in white foam at its crest, fascinating and horrible. I hold my breath and close my eyes as it washes over me, then it recedes and I gasp precious air. The water is high above my waist now, and the next wave is roaring in like an oncoming train, swelling green-black and monstrous in the moonlight.

Sure, I married Graham for his money, but I wasn't the first to do that. His former wife was a two-timing golddigger. He hired detectives and managed to divorce her without giving her any of his multimillion-dollar real-estate holdings in Florida. She couldn't even get back into the house to get most of her clothes—

Another wave strikes me, colder and with more savage force than the last. I have to shake my head to clear my eyes and nose of water. I cough, choking and spitting. I can't believe I didn't die right there. Wouldn't that cross up Larry, if I died without water in my lungs!

O.K., I married Graham but I didn't want to live the rest of my life with him. And after hearing about how he cut off his first wife, I knew divorce wasn't my answer. So I started driving my Porsche down to the Overlook Lounge about five miles down the coast. That's where I met Freddie.

He was sort of an aging beachcomber, with broad shoulders, a big smile, and a beautiful tan. He asked if he could buy me a drink. I said yes and we sized each other up.

He was single, living alone, seeing life getting shorter while his unfulfilled ambitions kept their distance. We got along well enough. "There's no way we can keep this a secret forever," I told him one night. "Word's bound to get out."

"So?" he said, tilting back his gorgeous head to drink his piña colada.

"So you can't be the one to kill my husband," I said.

He lowered the glass and stared at me. I explained how it would be better if he hired someone to kill Graham—that way the murderer would be once removed from anybody with a motive. Freddie could have an ironclad alibi and so could I.

"You're crazy," he said. "You don't know right from wrong."

I told him how much my husband was worth. He thought about it. Then we got down to details. Freddie hired Burt, an old acquaintance of his who used to be in the marine salvage business but

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was down on his luck and needed money. Burt had served time in the Midwest for killing a man who deserved killing. He figured the government owed him a victim who *didn't* deserve killing but whose demise would profit Burt. Graham was made to order.

The three of us worked out a plan and it worked just as neat as can be, like when I cried and cried until my father bought me a convertible for my high school graduation. I was the first girl in my crowd to own a car—but then I was way ahead of everyone in school in most things, not excluding looks, if you'll pardon my bragging about what happens to be true.

Anyway, while Freddie was with his mom in Milwaukee and I was on a shopping spree in Orlando, Burt hit Graham on the head, put him in his Mercedes sedan, and shoved the car and Graham over the cliff near the coast road by the estate. Nobody saw it as anything but an accident. I got lots of sympathy and really got to like how I looked in black.

Freddie, Burt, and I kept our distance from each other. That was supposed to last for six months, but about month three I started thinking, and worrying. Besides me, there were two other people who were aware that Graham had been murdered. I couldn't feel safe knowing that. Even if I married Freddie, we'd both have to worry about Burt. Of course I could have Freddie kill Burt, or vice versa, if you'll pardon the pun. But then I thought, why not hire someone to kill them both, someone twice removed from Graham's death? The police would never make a connection.

So after spending a week in Orlando and sort of screening candidates, I chose Larry. He was a great-looking guy, slender but strong, with sharp features, a neat little moustache, and kind of cold grey eyes that gave me shivers I liked. —Oh, this is terrible! That last wave was really scary! Wait a second, let me catch my breath before I go on.

It didn't take long to convince Larry he should do away with both Freddie and Burt and then spend the rest of his life with me and Graham's real-estate holdings.

Larry did a swell job too. As far as the cops or newspapers knew, Freddie and Burt were just two guys who barely knew each other who'd been killed in accidents in different parts of the state. That Larry sure is resourceful.

Too resourceful, it turns out. He talked me into putting a big, big chunk of Graham's money in a safe-deposit box in his name—to protect it from inheritance taxes, he said. He must have used the

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same mathematics I did—if two people besides me knowing about Graham's death was risky, *one* was risky. He figured I'd get rid of him after a while.

But he was wrong. I didn't plan on waiting a while. That's my single solace. Larry doesn't know about the dynamite from one of Graham's construction sites I wired to a timer under the front seat of his car. He'll never reach Miami. He'll die before I do.

And the state will get all of Graham's money! All of it! I ask you, is that right?

I suppose there's a moral here somewhere—the sort mother always found. Like if you keep getting yourself involved in something deeper and deeper, you're bound to drow—

DETECTIVERSE

JUST A MATTERHORN OF PRINCIPLE

by CECIL TALLEY

A man lay murdered
In the rarefied air.
The mountain climber's motive?
"Because he was there."

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How James Munro stole aboard the Carmania, *a transatlantic liner bound for Southampton, with no ticket or stateroom, and managed to survive without being detected until. . .*

THE LAST LINK

by ANDREW GARVE

"Attention, please! Will all visitors kindly leave the ship now. The *Carmania* is about to sail."

James Munro, standing in the thronged main lobby of the great liner, watched carefully as people around him began to make their last farewells and drift towards the gangway. He was a broad-shouldered, muscular man of medium height, forty years old, good-looking and alert. He wore a dark-grey suit, with a pale-grey shirt and a grey tie. He looked very respectable.

The loudspeaker crackled again. "All visitors ashore, please! All visitors ashore!"

Choosing his moment, Munro joined a group of people moving to the gangway and left the ship with them. Ashore, an official hand stretched out to collect the visitors' permits. Munro gave his up—then, with a sudden "Heavens, I've left my briefcase behind—I'll be back in a moment," he turned and dived back through the crowd. Glancing round as he reentered the ship, he failed to detect any ripple of disturbance behind him. He'd made it! He was back on board, and there'd be nothing in the records to show it. He picked up his briefcase and a cloth-covered, zipper-fastened bundle and went out on the afterdeck to watch the departure.

The visitors were lining the quayside now, waving handkerchiefs, shouting last messages. The passengers were lining the rail—hundreds of them. A long blast came from the siren. The gangways were hoisted ashore, the ropes cast off. A tug's screw began to turn. Slowly the liner drew out into the Hudson River, out into the harbor, out past the Statue of Liberty. The New York skyline faded in the autumn haze. Next stop, Southampton.

A man standing beside Munro said to his wife, "I think we'd better

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go and book our table, dear," and they moved away. Munro, fingering the raised weal of a scar across the back of his right hand, smiled grimly to himself. He'd have liked to book a table, too. But he couldn't—because he hadn't paid his fare, because he hadn't a cabin number to give, because he hadn't any right to be on board at all. And that was how it was going to be for six days.

The first thing, he decided, was to find someplace to hide his bundle. He couldn't possibly carry it around with him for a week—it was thirty inches long, twelve inches high, eighteen inches wide—far too bulky. Where would it attract the least attention? Munro set off to explore the tourist quarters of the two-class ship—the lounges, the bars, the cinema, the library, the pool, the gymnasium, the lavatories. As he'd rather expected, it was up on the sun deck that he found the best answer to his problem. Below the rail, lifeboats hung in their davits. He would hide the bundle in one of the boats.

Openly, while people were still busy with their own problems after the departure, Munro fetched the bundle and left it on a seat on the sun deck. No one took any notice of him. Then, after dark, he returned there. Having first made sure he had the deck to himself, he lowered the bundle into one of the boats on a length of tarred string, and lowered the string on a length of black twine, which he tied to the bottom rail. He wasn't entirely happy about the hiding place, but it was the best he could do.

During the next few days Munro applied himself with zest to the task of living illegally aboard a great ship without arousing any suspicion. He had briefed himself on the ship's routine before embarking on the enterprise, and as he'd foreseen there was no serious problem about food. He couldn't enter the dining room, but he could drink hot bouillon on the promenade deck at ten-thirty each morning and coffee in the lounge at eleven; he could get nuts and tidbits with his *apéritif* at twelve, tea and biscuits at four, and unlimited sandwiches from a buffet in the main lobby at midnight—all with no questions asked. It was a starchy diet, but he wouldn't starve.

Disposing of his person proved to be no great problem, either. In the daytime he had the run of the tourist class, like any other of the eight hundred passengers. He looked like a passenger and behaved like a passenger and there was no reason why anyone should be suspicious of him. At night the hazards were slightly greater—but the nights were short. There was dancing until two o'clock each

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morning, and some people stayed up long after that, giving him good cover. There was actually only an hour or two when he had to make himself scarce in order not to be conspicuous. Generally he found a sheltered seat on the afterdeck—and when, around dawn, sailors came to swab down he simply moved away until they'd finished. They showed no surprise—it wasn't unusual, after all, for a passenger affected by the motion of the ship to seek fresh air at any hour. Sitting out there was cold and uncomfortable—but that was an inescapable part of the enterprise.

In the mornings, Munro found himself an easy chair in one of the lounges and dozed peacefully, catching up on his sleep. By day he spent a good deal of time in the library, where he could bury himself in a magazine without risk of disturbance. He became a regular attender at films—the cinema was a snug, safe retreat for two performances each day. He took in two concerts and one church service. He exercised gently in the gymnasium. He avoided all organized social events like bingo sessions and horse racing and competitive games.

Throughout, he continued to look well dressed and personable. He had found a small, rarely used lavatory on the sun deck where he could safely wash and shave behind a locked door—and in his briefcase he had all the necessities. He even had a second grey shirt, which he changed into in midweek.

The only real danger, he soon discovered, was of becoming involved with some other passenger against his will. Aboard ship, people were friendly and chatty and inquisitive. So from the beginning, Munro walked alone. He stalked around with a blank, unwelcoming face, keeping his distance, avoiding conversation, meeting any advance with frosty brevity.

Even so, there were moments of difficulty. There was a Lancashire salesman, traveling alone, who at the merest nod from Munro had buttonholed him and started to pour out his life history. That had been on the second day, and Munro had found it hard to detach himself. Always after that he had kept a weather-eye open for the man, to avoid him. Once he'd been almost caught on the main deck, but he had slipped into the jewelry shop and talked briefly about aquamarines to the glamorous brunette behind the counter until the danger passed.

Otherwise everything seemed to be going well.

It was on the fourth day out that Munro was caught off guard and

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found himself in real trouble. The weather had deteriorated and the ship was pitching. Munro, late in the evening, was taking a constitutional along the covered promenade deck. Several other people were doing the same thing. As he approached the open end of the deck, where a girl was standing, the ship gave a sudden lurch. The girl grabbed at the nearest thing for support—which happened to be Munro. Munro lost his balance and fell, striking his knee on the deck.

He got up painfully. The girl, he saw, was the brunette from the jewelry shop.

"I'm *so* sorry," she said. "Are you all right?"

Munro, rubbing his knee, assured her that he was.

"It was stupid of me—I ought to have been holding the rail. Oh, dear, you're limping."

"It's nothing," Munro said. The other strollers had joined them and he feared a fuss. He began to move away.

The girl walked with him. "You've gone quite pale. Don't you think you ought to see the nurse?"

"No, really, I'm quite all right." Munro hobbled on.

The girl still looked doubtful. "Well, I shall ring you in the morning, just to make sure."

"I assure you it isn't necessary."

"It's the least I can do. I insist. What's your cabin number?"

For a second, Munro hesitated. Then he said, "Five seventy-five," choosing one at random, and forced a smile, and limped into a waiting elevator.

The damage to his knee was slight, as he'd said—but the other damage wasn't. He felt no surprise next evening when the girl, off duty, caught up with him in the main lounge. She gave him a slightly puzzled smile. "How's the knee?"

"Quite better, thank you."

"I did ring the cabin, but I must have misheard the number—it wasn't yours." She paused. "I thought you said five seventy-five."

Munro gave her a hunted look. "Well, no—" he began. Suddenly he grinned, and gave up. "Look, why don't we have a drink? What's your name?"

"Barney. Amanda Barney. What's yours?"

"James Munro."

"I'd love to have a drink," she said.

Munro called a steward and gave the orders. "Well, Miss Barney,"

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he said, "it looks as though I'll have to take you into my confidence—you've forced my hand. The fact is, I haven't got a cabin."

"Not got a cabin!"

"No—and I haven't paid my fare."

Amanda's dark eyes opened wide. "You can't mean you're a stowaway," she said.

"Well, yes—in a sense, I suppose I am."

The girl put down her drink. She looked most upset. "But this is awful. How can you be so calm about it? And why did you do it? You don't *look* like a stowaway."

"It's quite simple really," Munro said. "I'm on an initiative test."

"What on earth's that?"

"I'm in the Army—Intelligence Branch. Every now and again we're given tasks to test our initiative. Most are fairly easy, but this one's a snorter. We were dumped in New York and told to get home by sea or air without buying a ticket and without showing a passport. That's what I'm doing."

"You're not serious."

"I'm perfectly serious. So you can relax—it's all on the level. I've the whole authority of the War Office behind me. They'll see me through whatever happens. The question is, will *you*? If you give me away, I fail the test. Otherwise I think I may be able to make it."

"Well! I've never heard anything like it! How did you get aboard?"

Munro told her. "There are probably better ways—but that worked quite well."

"How will you get ashore at Southampton? You'll never do that, you know. The immigration people come aboard—you have to show your passport to get a landing card. You haven't a hope."

Munro gave a smug smile. "I'm not going to Southampton," he said. "I'm going to drop off before we get there."

"*Drop off!*"

"Yes, as we go up Spithead. I gather we're due there just before dawn. I've got an inflatable rubber boat with me."

"Good heavens!"

"It's in a bundle, up in one of the lifeboats—I hope! It's a patent thing, inflates automatically when it touches the water. I shall jump in with it and paddle ashore. The paddles are inside it."

Amanda shook her head incredulously. "It sounds utterly crazy to me. You'll probably drown."

"I don't think so."

"I hope you're a good swimmer, that's all."

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"As a matter of fact," Munro said, "I'm a rotten swimmer—but the boat's reliable. I've tested it. Works like a miracle—all you have to do is climb in. And the ship will be going very slowly up Spithead, don't forget—probably only a few knots. It'll be an easy jump. I'll be ashore and reporting my success before the ship berths. That is, if you'll give me a break and keep quiet about me."

Amanda looked at him uncertainly. "Where does the initiative come in if you rely on me?"

"Oh, the rules allow us to make use of anyone we can along the route. As a matter of fact, if you're going to help me there's something else you might do—hide my bundle under your bed till I need it. I'm scared stiff one of the sailors may notice that thread."

"It's a lot to ask," Amanda said. "I'll probably get the sack if anyone finds out."

"You won't, I assure you—the War Office will see to that."

"Well, I'll sleep on it. I'll let you know tomorrow."

When Munro looked in at the shop next morning, Amanda greeted him with a welcoming smile. She'd thought it over, she said, and she'd decided she wouldn't give him away and she would look after his bundle for him.

"That's my girl," Munro said. "Then I'll bring it down to the promenade deck exactly at nine tonight. I'll leave it by the seat just outside the foyer door and you can take it from there."

The transfer that evening went smoothly. The sun deck was empty when Munro arrived there to haul the bundle up. Ten minutes after he'd placed it by the seat it had gone.

Amanda joined him in the lounge a little later with a conspiratorial air. "All safe," she said. Munro ordered drinks and they talked for a long time—Munro talked mainly of the Army, Amanda was amusing about her work on the ship. She was, it soon appeared, an intelligent and sophisticated girl as well as a beautiful one. Presently they started to dance—and they danced till after midnight. For both of them, it was a memorable evening.

Now the last day had come—the end of the journey was in sight. The ship was nearing the Isle of Wight, on schedule. The weather was good, the sea calm. Munro had timed his jump for five in the morning. Amanda was to bring the bundle to the afterdeck immediately after two, when the dancing stopped, and Munro would meet her there and take over.

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She appeared on deck with the bundle promptly at ten minutes past two and sat down beside him on the seat where so often he'd spent the early hours of the morning. Her voice, as she greeted him, sounded a bit shaky.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Nervous?"

"Yes, I am. I wish you wouldn't do it, James. I think it's absolutely mad."

"Nonsense," Munro assured her, "it'll be a piece of cake."

"But it's so far to jump," she said. "And you might get caught in the propellers—anything. It seems such a stupid risk—just for an initiative test. It isn't as though there's anything big at stake." She sighed. "Still, I don't suppose I can persuade you."

"I'm afraid not," Munro said—and paused. "Maybe I ought to come clean with you now. You're right—there is a slight risk. For an initiative test, it *would* be stupid. The truth is, I'm not on an initiative test. I made that up. Actually, I'm a police officer. A detective inspector, on duty."

Amanda stared at him. "I don't understand."

"It's quite simple. I'm investigating a murder—a murder that took place on this ship three months ago. You must know about it."

"You mean—Miss Everett."

"That's right—the woman who was strangled in her cabin on her way back from New York the night before the ship docked. I expect you remember all the questioning aboard afterwards—but it didn't lead anywhere. After a while, I was put in charge of the case. There was one curious piece of evidence that I couldn't get out of my mind. Maybe you heard about it at the time. The murderer, whoever he was, slipped into Miss Everett's cabin only a split second before a woman in the next cabin came out—and Miss Everett was heard to exclaim 'Ralph!' before her door closed. Now Ralph happens to be the name of the nephew Miss Everett lived with before her death. Of course, she might just have been calling out the name of a man she knew, a sort of hopeless cry for help as she was attacked—but the witness was emphatic that the cry was one of surprise, just as though Miss Everett had seen someone of that name unexpectedly appear."

"Well, she couldn't possibly have seen her nephew, if that's what you're thinking," Amanda said. "He wasn't on board. I remember that was brought out—"

"I know," Munro said. "All the same, this bit of evidence nagged at me, and I thought I might as well find out just where Ralph

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Everett was at the time. A few weeks ago I went to see him at the home he shared with his aunt on the Kent coast. He's supposed to be in the import-export business, but he struck me as a playboy. Good-looking, vigorous, athletic type. Does a good deal of sailing.

"According to him, he was on a dinghy-camping holiday by himself while his aunt was in New York, where she'd been visiting a friend. I was able to check his departure, and return, in the dinghy, but not the time in between—and he couldn't produce any witnesses. I began to wonder if I might be on the track of an elaborate plot. Miss Everett's death would have been worth a plot to him—she left nearly half a million, and it's now all his. And it would have had to be elaborate to keep him in the clear, because as her heir he would be the obvious suspect.

"Anyway, I tried to work something out. I thought he might have flown to New York on a false passport. He'd been in trouble with the police once before over a passport offense—though naturally he hadn't told his aunt about it. And if he did fly to New York, I thought, maybe he could have contrived to come back on the *Carmania*, secretly."

Amanda gave a little nod. "Now I begin to see. As *you've* done—"

"Exactly. That's what I've been testing—whether it was feasible. The last link in the chain—or perhaps I should say the last link but one. Now I'm pretty sure it *was* feasible. He could have bought a self-inflating boat in America. He knew about them—I spotted one in the shed where he kept his boat gear."

"But if he'd been aboard the ship," Amanda said, "his aunt would have seen him around—long before she was killed."

"Not if he traveled tourist. She was traveling first class, as he knew. He booked the return passage for her."

"Surely someone here—some of the stewards—would have remembered his face, though. Haven't they been shown pictures of him?"

"Some of them have, yes. One even said he thought the face was a bit familiar. But he wasn't certain. It would have been easy enough for Everett to fix up some simple disguise—heavy glasses, a bit of a beard—"

Amanda seemed doubtful. "I must say it all sounds frightfully dangerous to me."

"Half a million's worth quite a bit of danger."

"Suppose someone had discovered his inflatable boat—assuming he had one. You've been worried enough about yours."

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"If anything at all had gone wrong," Munro said, "he naturally wouldn't have committed the murder. As for the boat, he was in a much better position than me. *He* wouldn't have had to hide his bundle in a lifeboat at all."

"Oh?"

"No. There's quite a lot I haven't told you yet. It seems that for some time before the murder Everett was in the habit of staying away from home for a couple of nights about every fortnight. On business, he said.

"I discovered that he always spent these periods in Southampton. I found the hotel where he stayed and learned that he'd been seen there with a young woman once or twice. I couldn't get an exact description of her—only that she was dark and very attractive. I also discovered that these visits of his coincided with the times this ship was turning round at Southampton. It almost seemed as though the girl might be someone off the *Carmania*—someone, perhaps, that he'd met on the ship. When I looked into that aspect I found that about six months ago Everett crossed in the *Carmania* on his way back from a business trip to New York.

"You see how everything begins to tie up—he'd even have known the routine of the ship. And, of course, if he'd had an accomplice aboard—some adventuress who was going to share the loot with him—he could have given her the bundle right from the start."

"It's fascinating," Amanda said. "Go on."

"Well," Munro continued, "when I came aboard I naturally kept my eyes open for this possible accomplice. I rather doubted if she'd be a stewardess—they're not usually quite the type. I imagined Everett would probably have told her about me—how I'd grilled him—and described me." Munro fingered the scar on his hand. "And I'm easily identifiable. I thought that if the girl existed and was still working in the ship, and if she saw me, and this scar, she would probably approach me sooner or later because she'd want to find out what I was up to."

He paused. Amanda didn't speak.

"Well, *you* approached me. You recognized me in the shop, of course. You stumbled against me on the deck deliberately, to get on talking terms. You tried to pump me, and I invented the initiative test. When you agreed to keep my secret and hide the bundle for me, I felt pretty certain you were the accomplice. I couldn't believe any employee would take such responsibility with a stranger unless she had some ulterior motive. Of course, you knew the story wasn't

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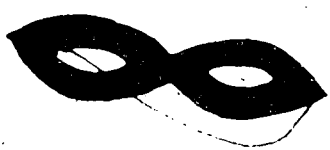
true, anyway—you knew by then that I was reconstructing Everett's trip, that the net was closing."

There was a little silence. Then Amanda said, "You spoke of the last link but one. What is the last link?"

"Do I need to tell you?" Munro picked up the black bundle. "I left this with the zipper slightly undone. Now it's pulled tight." He took off the cloth cover and raised the rubber boat to the light. Under the inflator nozzle, a four-inch square of rubber had been roughly hacked out of the fabric with scissors or a knife.

"I felt sure the temptation would prove too much for you," Munro said. "It could have given you and Everett time to make your getaway, of course—

"Well, there it is. Miss Barney, I'm now arresting you for being concerned with Ralph Everett in the murder of his aunt, Edith Everett, and I have to warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence—" He took her arm firmly but not roughly and led her below.



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a *NEW* short story by

GEOFFREY BUSH

The typewriter was a irthday present from Muriel. ertram was ound and determined to cure her of her ha it of " orrowing" his things. . .

THE OO Y TRAP

by GEOFFREY BUSH

Monday

All is ready. I am quite calm. The only thing necessary now is patience—and not to press one letter. The letter in the middle of the ottom row. To press the spacé ar, instead, directly elow it. Perfectly simple, fortunately, for one of my intelligence and dexterity.

Tuesday

I shall explain. To myself, of course. I am the only person who will read this remarka le journal.

And with what joy will I read it! And reread it!

On Sunday night Muriel " orrowed"—the word must e put in quotation marks—my toenail scissors. The scissors with which I have trimmed my toenails for forty years. I looked for them in their appointed place, next to my sleeping pills. I surveyed the rest of the top of my ureau, then searched the first drawer in the event they had fallen into it.

"Oh ernard," Muriel exclaimed, smiling cheerily, "I must have taken them."

I realized, with invigorating certainty, the feeling that had swept over me.

Rage.

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Yes, I know what you are thinking. You, that is, who will never peruse the record.

Ridiculous, you are saying to yourself. A surd. He is taking leave of his senses.

With a smile, no dou t, much like Muriel's.

Let me continue.

My toenail scissors is not the first thing she has " orrowed." Nor the twentieth. Nor, dear non-reader, the two-hundredth.

Everything I own—every o ject that was once mine—she has " orrowed." And lost. Or forgotten. Or roken. Or, occasionally, "returned." Weeks later, having come upon it, perhaps, in the pocket of a raincoat—also " orrowed."

It is all hers!

I have nothing left!

I have taken a turn through the house. I have made myself a cup of dandelion tea—I can no longer drink caffeine—in the kitchen, using one of the teacups reserved for guests. My own cup is missing. Possi ly it is in the pantry. Or the upstairs athroom. I am not going to look for it. When she could not find her own—she can never find anything of her own—she simply " orrowed" mine.

I am quite calm again.

I know my enemies.

Weakness. Hesitation. Indecision.

I know my strength.

The power that swept over me when I realized on Sunday night that my toenail scissors were the last straw. That I was going to act.

That I knew, instantly, effortlessly, *how*.

I slept soundly. I awakened keen and whole and as soon as Muriel had left for the university I retired to my study.

My electric typewriter, a handsome machine, was a present to me—on my fortieth irthday—from Muriel, intended, she said, to facilitate the composition of my three-volume masterwork on early, middle, and late Icelandic poetry. Which, it is not irrelevant to note, I have not, during the ten years that followed, egun.

Why not?

A penetrating question that goes to the heart of my tragically mistaken marriage.

She has prospered, you point out. Fame and fortune are hers, thanks to her stream—her *deluge*—of ludicrously well received

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pu lications in the field of *women's studies.* How can such a topic exist?—the very phrase is contradictory.

How could this have happened? You are right to wonder. How could this attractive—yes, we must grant her that, and other attri utes, including her tiresome energy, her monotonous cheeriness—how could this person—this *female* person—so far outshine one whose intellect—

I shall go no further. I shall supply the answer, staggering as it is.

In year after year of matrimony, she has drained him of his talents.

She has stripped him of his career.

She has *" orrowed" his life.*

Another turn through the house, to still my eating heart.

I shall come to the point.

One of the few skills I still possess, that she has allowed me to retain, is a quick grasp of anything mechanical—the explanation, perhaps, of my understanding of Scandinavian ver forms. I had no difficulty in unscrewing a few screws, changing one or two connections, and wrapping a wire several times around one of the plastic keys. Dislodged from its position in the orderly ranks of the key oard—or so it will appear to an uninformed o server—during the course of an amateurish attempt at home repairs. And foolishly wired in place.

The " ," for " ertram," seemed appropriate.

The power that swept over me on Sunday night was—shall I say it? I have sudden, irrepressi le wit—an *electric* power. That I can *transmit.*

Sooner or later, she who has so often " orrowed" my electric typewriter will discover that her own has once again, as she puts it, "gone haywire." And sit down, once more, to " orrow" mine.

And I will get my own ack.

Wednesday

No results. She spent yesterday at home, a promising development. To give her unimpeded access to my study, I passed the morning in the living room with the learned journal that rejected my last contri ution—devising, in my elation, several devastating retorts. In the afternoon I raked leaves.

Instead, however, of ascending to her "work space" on the second floor—formerly the children's "play space" (for she insists, hypo-

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critically, that I must have the "real" study on the ground floor)—she puttered a out in various pointless ways in the kitchen and dining room. At intervals, to my annoyance, she looked into the living room or the ack yard to ask if I was tired. Or if I wanted a cup of tea.

On Monday and Wednesday mornings, she delivers her preposterously popular undergraduate lectures. When she departed for that purpose this morning, I went up to her "work space" to hurry my plans along—by wrenching one of the letters of her own electric typewriter, a less expensive model, out of alignment. The "M," for "Muriel."

This accomplished, I went for a long walk, to permit her time to return, find that her typewriter had "gone haywire," and think—aha!—of a su stitute. She is quite accustomed to my going on long walks. Since the cancellation of my graduate seminar, "Old Norse: An Introduction," I have een going on increasingly long walks.

While I was thus occupied, I reviewed my arrangements. I saw no flaws. A ghastly accident, friends will say. Electrocuted by a typewriter. By *his* typewriter, that the poor fellow had been trying to fix. And she had " orrowed."

Good heavens, they will add in alarm, it could have een *him!*

I turned my footsteps toward the house with anticipation. What would greet me, the clatter of dinner preparations or an unfamiliar, ominous silence?

She greeted me, starting up from a chair as I opened the front door. She was relieved, she said, that I was home "at last."

My irritation struggled, internally, with growing mirth.

The "relief," when it comes, will be mine, not hers!

To recover all that she has taken—at a single stroke, a single spark—

I must remem er to visit the cellar and install a larger fuse.

No "relief " could provide such inexpressi

I have just stood up, flexed my fingers, and sat down.

I almost pressed the for idden key.

I can feel the perspiration drying on my forehead.

I must e more careful.

Thursday

Still no results. A difficult night. Why has that old dream returned? I never had a white mouse. During the day, a long walk.

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In the evening, constant attendance from Muriel, with rapid, sidelong glances when she supposed I was not looking.

And not a moment spent at her typewriter. What is the matter with the woman?

Friday

What is keeping the wretched creature from her "work"?

Saturday

Does she suspect something?

Sunday

@#$%¢&!

Monday

A week, a *week,* and nothing! Fury u led up in me at reakfast, over my fourth cup of tea. I had not heard her working upstairs lately, I remarked. She did not smile. "No," she said. Why not? She had not felt like it. And why had she not felt like it? She was too "concerned." A out what?" "You." Me? Incredulously. "The—look you've had on your face." What look? "Like it's the end of the world." I laughed loudly. Nonsense, I said. I patted her hand—a little a ruptly, perhaps. She withdrew it and nursed it with her other hand.

She stood up and took a deep reath. "I have to teach this morning." She would not look at me. "Will you promise—you won't do anything to yourself?"

What is she talking a out?

I am not going to do anything to myself. *She* is going to do something to *her*self.

I have looked at my face in the mirror.

It is true that I am a little paler than usual. My eyes stare out of their caves a little more like wild animals. My lower lip has its old twitch, as if I were a out to urst into tears.

ut I am quite calm!

There is no need to e concerned a out me. *She* is the one to e concerned a out.

This is not the end of *my* world. This is the b

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a *NEW* short story by

CLARK HOWARD

This was 1968, during the heat of the Vietnam War, and night after night, for some perverse reason not even they understood, the men in Room 131 at the Harry Truman Veteran's Hospital were drawn to watch the carnage reported on The Six O'Clock News. *"The continuing story of men in battle," said Connor, who had been wounded by a sniper on Guadalcanal and paralyzed from the waist down. "Yesterday's heroes, today's cripples" . . .*

OLD SOLDIERS

by CLARK HOWARD

It was early morning, not yet six. A surgical nurse and an orderly, both in green, walked briskly but quietly down one of the patient wings at Harry Truman Veteran's Hospital. The orderly pushed a rubber-wheeled gurney that moved almost as silently as he did. At the door to Room 131, the nurse entered and turned on the light. It was a four-bed room. Sitting up on the bed to the left of the door was Ed Latham, a thin nervous man. He had been sitting in the dark, smoking.

"Time to go, Mr. Latham," the nurse said, taking the cigarette away from him with a scolding look. The orderly pushed the gurney next to the bed and began to help Latham onto it.

Now the other three men in the room came awake and began to sit up in their respective beds. In the rear bed to the right of the room's solitary window was George Smiddy, a World War I veteran, who had recently celebrated his seventieth birthday. A tough, grizzled old man whose face looked like the Nevada desert, he had suffered most of his adult life from mustard gas poisoning contracted in the Argonne Forest campaign.

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On the other side of the window from Smiddy was Frank Connor, a man in his early fifties. Wounded by a sniper on Guadalcanal, Connor was paralyzed from the waist down. A wheelchair was parked beside his bed.

Facing Latham's bed was Eugene Aidman's. Eugene was in his late thirties and the youngest man in the room. A Korean War vet, he was completely bald and had a visible metal plate in his head. On his bedtable was a portable tape player that he carried wherever he went. Most of the other patients in the hospital thought he was crazy because he never listened to anything but military band music.

As their friend Latham was about to be wheeled out to surgery he was wished good luck by the other three men, each in his own way.

"Hang in there, Latham," said Aidman, rubbing his bald head.

"Try to make it back for supper," said Connor. "It's Tuesday—you wouldn't want to miss the meatloaf."

"Don't be grabbing any feels from the nurses in the operating room," old Smiddy advised. "Could make 'em drop a sponge in you."

Latham waved as he was wheeled out. "So long, fellows."

An aura of gloom settled over the room after Latham had gone. Gloom and a little anger.

"Why the hell can't they just leave him alone?" Connor asked tensely. "He doesn't want all these damned operations. Why don't they just admit he can't be helped? Just like we can't be helped."

"I can be helped," said Aidman with a fixed stare. "I'm confident the doctors will make me see again."

"Shut up," said Connor. "You're not even blind."

"V.A. doctors are like Army doctors," Smiddy said knowingly. "They'll find a cure even if it kills you."

"This is the fifth time they've cut him open," Connor continued. "If they keep taking pieces out, he's going to be empty."

Smiddy sat up on the side of his bed. "Who's got the latrine first this morning?" he asked.

"I have," said Connor.

"Well, hop in your kiddie car and get in there. My bladder's as old as I am, you know."

"Nothing's as old as you are," Connor said.

"The pyramids are," said Aidman.

"Oh, yeah—I forgot about them."

"I'll use the bedpan," Smiddy threatened.

Connor scrambled into his chair and tooled into the bathroom . . .

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Two hours later the three men were straggling back down the corridor from breakfast, all wearing identical blue pinstriped bathrobes over plain white cotton pajamas. Connor puffed on a foul cigar as he wheeled along. Aidman munched an apple. The two men moved at reduced speed so old Smiddy could keep up with them. But they harassed him for it.

"Geez, Smiddy, can't you move any faster?" Aidman complained. "We're always the last ones to the rec room."

"Go on ahead," Smiddy growled. "I didn't ask you to wait for me."

"The floor nurse told us to stay with you," Connor said around his cigar. "She's afraid you'll wander off and get lost."

"That's a damn lie!" Smiddy snapped. "I'd knock you down if you could stand up!"

"Hey, look—" said Aidman, stopping and pointing down the corridor toward their room.

A short man in white was coming out of 131 with a cardboard box in his hands. He was a wing orderly the patients called "Undertaker" because he was responsible for cleaning out a patient's personal effects when the patients died. Looking up, he saw the three occupants of 131 stop and stare at him. He walked slowly over to them.

"Latham died on the table," he said quietly.

Old Smiddy sighed heavily and leaned a frail shoulder against the wall. Aidman, next to him, stared straight ahead and blinked back tears. Connor smacked a fist into his palm and glared up at Undertaker.

"Don't assign nobody else to his bed, you hear me? We don't want nobody else in the room with us!"

Undertaker shrugged. "I'm not sure I can do that, Connor," he said quietly. "Beds are scarce."

"I don't care!" Connor stormed. "We don't want nobody else in with us!" He took the cigar out of his mouth and his voice softened. "Look, it just ain't worth it. You get a new guy in your room, live with him for a year or two while those meatballs over in surgery take him apart piece by piece, you get to liking him, he gets to be your friend, then *bang*—" he put the cigar back in his mouth and slammed his fist into his palm again, "—the guy's dead and you've lost a friend." A pitiful expression settled on his face. Like Aidman, his eyes moistened. "I've lost enough friends," he said quietly. "I don't want to lose any more."

Aidman patted Connor on the shoulder and pushed him toward

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their room. Smiddy shuffled along behind them. Undertaker, left alone in the hall, stared sadly after them.

Two days later the men were out on the field of a vast cemetery of symmetrically placed crosses. They stood beside a freshly covered grave with a single wreath on it.

"Another casualty," Smiddy said quietly. He looked around, his eyes sweeping the rows of crosses. "When I first came to this hospital back in '21, there were only sixteen graves here. Now it's like the remains of a battlefield."

"It *is* the remains of a battlefield," Aidman said.

Connor looked up from his chair. "The chaplain's already prayed over Latham, but don't you think we should say something too? Being as how we were his only friends?"

"Good idea," said Aidman. "You do it, Smiddy."

Smiddy scowled. For a long moment he looked at the grave in contemplation. Then he cleared his throat and spoke.

"Old soldiers never die. They just fade away."

After Smiddy said it, Aidman slipped a cassette into his tape player and turned it on. The military band strains of "The Stars and Stripes Forever" began to play. The three of them came to attention as the music wafted over the rows of graves.

Life—and death—went on at Harry Truman Veteran's Hospital. A month passed. Room 131 now had a hand-lettered sign on the outside of its door: NEW MAGAZINES FOR SALE—HALF PRICE. Undertaker looked at the sign in disgust as he parked his mail cart and carried in two large bundles, one of magazines, the other of bills for the magazines.

"Good day, orderly," Connor greeted him. "Put the magazines right over there—" he pointed to Latham's old bed, now stripped of linen, its bare mattress covered by the display of a wide variety of magazines "—and toss that bundle of bills in the incinerator."

"How long do you think you can get away with this?" Undertaker asked. "You must owe a thousand dollars to these publishers."

Connor drew up in his chair indignantly. "Me? Owe money? I don't owe nothing to nobody. If you'll look at the address labels, you'll see that all the magazines *and* the bills are made out to O. C. Cupant in Room 131 of the Harry Truman Veteran's Hospital. O. C. Cupant spells 'Occupant' and federal law states that people don't have to

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pay for anything sent to 'Occupant.' It's not my fault if the magazines are too dumb to catch on."

"I still think you're gonna get caught," said Undertaker. "You're using the mails to defraud."

"Big deal," said Aidman. "So what if he gets caught? What are they gonna do, send him to prison? In order to do that, they first gotta build a new prison—one with wheelchair ramps and wider cells."

Undertaker dumped the bundle of new magazines on the bed. "Well, anyway, you're gonna have to find someplace else to display your wares. This bed's gonna be occupied starting tomorrow."

"You little rat," Smiddy growled from his bed. "We said we didn't want nobody else in here."

"It's not my fault. There's a shortage of beds. Anyway, it won't be for long. This guy's a transfer from Tokyo General. His lungs were damaged by napalm fumes in 'Nam. They're not purifying his blood like they should. The army docs have only given him a couple of months. He's coming here to die 'cause he's got no family."

The three patients raised collective hell. "Why put him in here with us? Find someplace else for him! Pitch a tent out on the cemetery and put him in there—that's where he's headed anyway! Give us a break!"

The new patient's name was Steve Crane. He was in his mid-twenties, still in uniform, wearing sergeant's stripes. Undertaker brought him in one afternoon when the men were out. "Have a seat on the chair there while I make up your bed," he said.

The younger soldier leaned his duffle bag against the wall and sat down. He was tired from the long flight from Tokyo. Turning in the chair, he looked out the window at the vast cemetery. His expression was one of resignation: he knew he was dying and apparently had accepted it.

While Undertaker was making the bed, the room's other three occupants straggled in. Each one stopped and stared at Crane. He stared back at them, curious about these men with whom he would spend the final days of his life. Finally Connor wheeled forward, all business—he didn't even offer to shake hands.

"I'm Connor, World War Two. That's Aidman, Korea. The old guy is Smiddy, from the Great War. We take turns having first call on the latrine. The TV is rented. If you want a share of that, it'll cost you three bucks a week and every fourth day will be yours—otherwise

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you have to watch what we watch. Aside from that, there ain't no other rules: it's live and let live, so to speak. But you ought to know from the start that we ain't very sociable. Get my meaning?"

Crane's eyes narrowed slightly. "I get the picture. Don't worry. I'm not looking to make any lifelong friends—so to speak."

Aidman and Smiddy went to their beds without saying anything. Connor turned his wheelchair toward his own bed. Crane resumed staring out the window. Undertaker, finishing up with the bed, looked from Connor to Aidman to Smiddy. "Nice guys," he muttered.

"Mind your own business, orderly," Connor snapped.

"Yeah, this is between soldiers," said Smiddy.

"I don't need nobody to fight my battles," Crane told Undertaker.

The beleaguered orderly threw up his hands in surrender and left.

After a moment, Crane opened his duffle bag and removed a small framed photo of a dark-haired, pretty young woman. He wiped it off on his sleeve and set it on his bedtable. Then he loosened his tie and stretched out on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

Connor, Smiddy, and Aidman all looked at the photo, exchanged glances, and shrugged.

"I thought you said the guy had no family," Aidman accused Undertaker in the corridor after supper that night. "Who the hell's the girl in the picture—his doctor?"

"Man, I don't know who she is," Undertaker demurred. "All I know is what's on the guy's card. If you want to know who she is, why don't you ask him?"

"That's personal," Connor said. "We ain't getting personal with this guy."

"You find out for us," Smiddy said to Undertaker.

"Me? How can *I* find out?"

"The way you find out everything else, snooping in the files. Find out which outfit he was in, then cross-check the records and find somebody else who was in the same outfit. It's a big hospital—somebody must know him."

"What does it matter who she is anyway?"

"It matters," said Aidman. "If he's got family or a girl friend, he's got no business dying with us. He should be made to die with somebody he knows."

The trio went on into 131 and Connor turned on the TV set. It was his night to have possession of the remote-control unit, and therefore the programming. But it was their custom to watch *The*

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Six O'Clock News no matter whose turn it was. This was 1968, during the heat of the Vietnam War, and night after night, for some perverse reason not even they understood, they were drawn to watch the carnage reported in the news.

"Time for 'This Is Your War,' " Connor said. "The continuing story of men in battle, yesterday's heroes, today's cripples."

As the commentator began talking about the bombing of Hanoi, Crane got off his bed, put on his robe and slippers, and left the room. The others didn't pay much attention. The next evening when Aidman turned on the same news program Crane left again. This time the men noticed. On the third night, when he left still again, they knew. "It's the war news," said Smiddy. "It gets to him."

"Tough," said Connor. "Turn it up, will you?"

"Probably reminds him he's dying," offered Aidman.

"We're all dying," Connor told him. "Some of us are just doing it faster than others."

Aidman went to the door and looked down the hall. He saw Steve Crane sitting alone on the stairs. Aidman felt the metal plate in his head. He couldn't help feeling a little disturbed.

The next day the three men were playing cards in the rec room when Undertaker came in.

"I found out who the girl in the picture is. She's a French nurse he fell for in the hospital in Saigon. A guy being trained on a new leg over in Prosthetics was in the hospital there with him. He said Crane and this nurse fell for each other real heavy—a kind of love-at-first-sight thing. Her name is Ceil Chatálier. Everybody in the hospital knew about it. They spent all their free time together. When Crane was transferred to Tokyo General, the girl hitched rides on supply planes to go see him on weekends. They were putting through the paper work to get permission to be married. Then Crane learned he was dying, the Tet offensive began, and the nurse was evacuated, probably back to France. Crane's been trying for months to find her—writing letters to the French government, the French medical associations, hospitals in Paris—but so far no trace of her."

"He doesn't still want to marry her, does he?" asked Aidman.

Undertaker shook his head. "Not according to this guy in Prosthetics. He just wants to write her a letter before he dies. Or maybe talk to her on an overseas call."

"Don't seem like much to ask," Aidman reflected.

Smiddy shook his head. "A damn shame he can't find her."

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"Yeah, war is hell," Connor commented. "It's your deal, Aidman."

A few mornings later Undertaker came hurrying into the solarium where all four of the men were sunning. He had an official-looking envelope for Crane, who was a little off to himself from the others.

"You're not supposed to get this until the regular mail run," he said, "but it's all the way from France and it looks important."

Crane tore open the letter. But his expression of anticipation dissolved to disappointment as he read it. Finally he sighed quietly but very deeply, crumpled the letter into a ball and dropped it into his wastebasket, and left the solarium.

Undertaker retrieved the letter and read it.

"It's from the French Medical Corps," he said. "Ceil Chatalier was discharged from service in Paris six months ago. There's no record of her present whereabouts."

The men all looked a little downcast, and this time there was no gruff remark from Connor.

That evening, when it was time for the news, Smiddy picked up the remote-control unit and switched on the set. Crane, as usual, got up and started for the door.

"Hey, kid, you don't have to leave," said Smiddy. "I've decided to watch *The Hollywood Squares* tonight."

Connor stared at him incredulously. "Are you crazy? *The Hollywood Squares?*"

"You don't have to do me any favors, pop," said Crane.

"To answer *your* question," Smiddy said archly to Connor, "no, I'm not crazy. And for *your* information," he said to Crane, "I'm not doing you any favors, *sonny*. It's my night to use the television and I've decided to watch something besides the damned bloody war news. To hell with both of you if you don't like it." And he turned on *The Hollywood Squares*.

Connor and Crane looked at each other.

"All right!" Connor said indignantly. "If that's the way you feel about it!" He flipped off the bed into his chair and wheeled out of the room.

"I'm not staying either," Crane said. "I don't need no buddy-buddy charity from anybody." He stalked off in a different direction down the hall from Connor—but presently Connor stopped and spun his chair around. "Hey, kid!" he hollered at Crane.

Crane paused and looked back. "Yeah?"

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"To hell with that old fool. Come over to the canteen and I'll buy you a beer."

Crane thought about it for a moment. Then he nodded curtly. "Why not?"

As Crane and Connor went off down the hall together, Aidman, watching from the door of 131, turned to Smiddy and winked. "It worked."

Smiddy merely grunted. He was staring at the television, engrossed in the game show he had turned on.

A couple of days later, the four men were wandering around the grounds together. Aidman had his tape player, with a cassette of "Colonel Bogey's March" playing on low volume.

"You know," Smiddy told Crane, "we might be able to help you find that girl of yours. I've got a friend who owns a bistro in Lyons. He went back over there after the war and married a French woman. He's probably got a lot of contacts that he could ask for help. Be a lot easier than writing all those letters and waiting for answers."

"Sure," said Connor, "and I've got a buddy who's a T.W.A. pilot and flies to Paris all the time. Maybe he could check some of those hospitals that never replied."

"You guys are really desperate to get rid of me, aren't you?" Crane chided, only half in jest. "You think if I locate Ceil I'll find some way to go to France and then you can have the room to yourselves again."

"Well, it would be nice to watch *The Six O'Clock News* again," Connor admitted. "*Hollywood Squares* depresses me. All those happy people winning all that money."

"You're just sore because you're broke and cripple," said Aidman.

"Not at all," Connor retorted. "I take pride in being broke and cripple. It's very gratifying to know I'm a permanent burden to the taxpayers."

Smiddy got serious again. "What do you say, kid? Do you want us to try and help you find your girl?"

Crane nodded, embarrassed. "Thanks," he said quietly.

"Don't mention it," Smiddy said, slapping him on the back. "Us old soldiers got to stick together."

That evening, when Crane had gone to the movie in the rec room, Aidman said, "You know, what he said earlier, about finding some

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way to go to France, got me to thinking. Suppose he *could* go over there, either to see her or to look for her if we don't find her first?"

"Where would he get the money to do that?" Smiddy asked. "The kid's practically broke, just like us. All he's got is his lousy disability pension."

"Yeah," said Connor, "and traveling to Europe ain't exactly cheap—you're talking about a lot of bucks."

"What if we all chipped in?"

"Still wouldn't have enough," Smiddy said. "Even with Connor's magazine money, we wouldn't have enough."

"Well maybe there's another way," Aidman said. "With this plate in my head, I could go at any time. And I've still got my G.I. life insurance. Ten thousand bucks."

Smiddy and Connor exchanged shocked looks.

"What the hell are you getting at?" Connor asked suspiciously.

"If you're talking suicide, forget it," Smiddy growled. "Soldiers don't do that."

"I'm not talking about suicide," said Aidman. "I'm not even talking about really dying. But if we could get the right paperwork going to make the government *think* I died—I mean, it's a big hospital, guys must cash in every day. Who'd notice an extra set of papers?"

Now Smiddy and Connor exchanged interested looks.

The next day, when Undertaker was making his mail run, Smiddy fell in beside him in the corridor. "Mind if I walk along with you for a while?" he asked with a smile.

Undertaker looked at the old man suspiciously. "I thought you didn't like me."

Smiddy feigned surprise. "What in the world made you think that?"

Undertaker shrugged.

"You're always calling me names."

"Well, maybe I just never really appreciated you before. I didn't realize you had so much responsibility around here."

"My job's not easy," Undertaker admitted. "I work a lot harder than the doctors do."

"I'm beginning to realize that. I just found out you're the one who does most of the work when a patient dies."

"We call it 'expires,' " Undertaker corrected. "When a patient expires."

"Yes, of course, expires. How nice. You have to take care of all that paperwork, don't you?"

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"Well, *I* don't exactly take care of it. What I do is collect all the information so the records section can take care of it."

"What do you mean? What information?"

"I pick up the death certificate from the doctor on duty, I take the patient's medical file from the ward, I get a claim certificate from the insurance office, and I take it all to the records section for processing."

Smiddy played dumb. "Processing?"

"That's when the records section notarizes the death certificate, closes out the medical file, and sends in the claim form for the expired patient's government insurance."

"I see. Then whoever his beneficiary is gets an insurance check?"

"Right."

"A very efficient system," Smiddy said, nodding. "Nice and simple."

Undertaker smiled, pleased. "You want me to tell you about all I have to do when a patient is transferred?"

"No, I don't," Smiddy growled. He had learned all he needed to know. "I don't have time to stand around and listen to you brag about how important you are. Expire! Sounds like you're talking about some damned license plate. Get away from me, you little rat!"

Now that they knew the procedure, the men put their plan to work.

Connor wheeled up to a desk in the hospital bank and smiled at the girl on duty. "I'm a new patient just transferred in from Walter Reed Medical Center. I'd like to open a checking account, please."

"All right, sir. What is your name, please?"

"Cupant," Connor said. "O. C. Cupant."

While Connor was doing that, Smiddy shuffled into the insurance office. "I need a change of beneficiary form," he told the clerk. "I'm outliving all my relatives."

And in another corridor, well away from Room 131, Aidman slipped into an orderly supply closet and used the badge-making machine to punch out a hospital nameplate: O. C. Cupant. On his way out, he stole a white orderly's uniform.

Later in the day, Connor wheeled past the nurse's station on their own wing and stopped at the drinking fountain. At the opposite end of the corridor, Smiddy slipped over to the fire alarm and pulled it. A loud bell began ringing. All the nurses at the station immediately rushed out to search for the fire. During the confusion, Connor

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wheeled behind the counter, opened a desk drawer, and tore off several sheets from a pad of blank death certificates. Spinning his chair around, he then pulled open a file drawer and quickly snatched out Aidman's medical record. He was back out in the corridor, the stolen articles under his bathrobe, when the nurses determined that it had been a false alarm and returned to their stations.

On his way back to 131, Connor stuck his head in the door of another patient's room. "Hey, Lenny, let me borrow your portable typewriter for an hour, will you?" Lenny acquiesced and, with the typewriter on his lap, Connor was wheeling home when Aidman came hurrying up to him.

"It's the kid," he said urgently. "Undertaker found him unconscious on the floor of the room. They've got him in the trauma section trying to bring him back."

The men waited tensely in the corridor outside the trauma unit.

"He was white as a ghost when I found him," Undertaker said. "I thought for sure he'd bought it."

"You mean you thought he'd expired," Smiddy said sarcastically.

Presently a doctor emerged. "He's coming out of it," he told them, "but it was close. His lungs are deteriorating badly. I don't think he has more than a few weeks left."

The men started walking back to their room. "We're going to have to hustle if we expect to pull this off in time," Connor said.

"We can make it," Smiddy told him confidently. "We're almost ready. You sent in the form naming O. C. Cupant your beneficiary, right?" he said to Aidman. Aidmen nodded. "And you," Smiddy turned back to Connor, "got the blank death certificate and the medical file. The bank account is open. All we need now is that claim certificate from the insurance office."

Connor looked at Aidman. "That's your job."

"I know. I'll do it tomorrow morning. I just hope it works."

"It will."

They heard running footsteps and turned to see Undertaker hurrying toward them. "In the excitement I forgot why I went into your room in the first place," he said when he caught up. "I was bringing this telegram that came for Connor."

Frowning, Connor opened the envelope. He read the message, then looked up smiling. "It's from my buddy, Al, the T.W.A. pilot. He's located the girl. She's working at Notre Dame Hospital in Vitry, just outside Paris . . ."

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The next morning the three men moved casually along the corridor near the insurance office. As usual, they were dressed in bathrobes, but now Aidman had a towel around his neck under the robe collar. When they were just past the insurance-office door, they paused as if having a conversation, looking around to make sure no one was paying any attention to them. Then Aidman whipped off the robe and towel, revealing underneath an orderly uniform complete with name badge. Connor reached under his own robe and passed him a curly black wig which he flopped onto his metal-plated skull. "How do I look?" he asked nervously.

"Like Burt Reynolds."

"Really?" Aidman said, preening.

"Get in there," Smiddy growled, pushing him.

Aidman straightened his shoulders and sauntered into the office. "Morning," he said to a woman at the first desk. He took a slip of paper from his pocket. "I need a claim certificate for a guy named Aidman, first name Eugene. Patient number 1172-307. Expired yesterday of a brain hemorrhage."

The woman took the slip and checked her files. "Are you new?" she asked.

"No, I've been here for a while. I usually work nights. I'm filling in for a guy."

"Here it is," she said, pulling out a card. "Ten thousand dollars. Just let me put a date on it and stamp it. Expired yesterday? You have the death certificate?"

"Yeah." Aidman handed her the fake certificate Connor had typed up. It felt a little odd processing the paperwork on his own death.

When the woman finally handed him the validated certificate, she glanced at his name badge. "Cupant. I knew a fellow named Cupant once. In college."

"No kidding?" Aidman said, immediately intrigued. "Did he get a lot of mail?"

"I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, no reason." Aidman shrugged. Going back down the hall, he was joined by Connor and Smiddy, who gave him his robe to put back on.

Snatching off the wig, he raised his eyebrows maniacally and said gleefully, "O. C. Cupant strikes again!"

A few days later, Steve Crane returned to Room 131 from his stay in the recuperation ward. The men welcomed him with a hand-

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lettered sign that read BACK FROM THE DEAD, a bottle of champagne, and Aidman's cassette player turned on to a tape of "It's a Grand Old Flag." Crane was pleased. It was genuine evidence of his acceptance by the men: he was one of them now.

But all was not going well with their plan. During the celebration, Undertaker came to the door and motioned Connor into the hall.

"I don't know what you guys are up to," he said, "but I think you ought to know that the F.B.I. was here a little while ago. They were looking into an account in the name of O. C. Cupant that was opened at the hospital bank. They also talked to administration about a government insurance check that's been sent here: somebody's trying to beat the government out of ten grand. They didn't catch on until after the check was mailed, so they couldn't stop it earlier. Anyway, when it comes in I'm not supposed to deliver it to Room 131. I'm supposed to turn it over to administration and then the F.B.I. guys are gonna come back out."

Connor nodded solemnly. "I appreciate the tip," he said.

Undertaker shrugged. "Don't mention it. All's it could do is cost me my job."

Later, when Crane was taking a nap, Connor met the other two men in the snack shop and told them what Undertaker had said. "It looks like they've got us," he concluded dejectedly. "They're gonna grab the check before it even gets to us."

"Even if they didn't," Aidman said, "we'd still be up the creek. With them onto the bank account, there's no way we could cash a ten-thousand-dollar check."

The men fell into a silent depression. Then they heard a voice say: "Sounds like you guys got a problem."

They looked around and saw Undertaker.

"You spying on us, you little rat?" Smiddy said threateningly.

"Not really," said Undertaker. "But I think I've figured out what you're up to. I, uh, thought maybe I could help."

"We don't need your help," Smiddy growled.

"Wait a minute," said Aidman, curious. "How do you think you can help us, Undertaker?"

"I'm the one who sorts the mail, so I'm the one who'll be getting the check," he reminded them. "Plus which I've got an established bank account outside the hospital, so I can cash it."

The three men at the table exchanged silent glances. Their expressions changed to interest.

"Sit down," said Connor, pulling up a chair.

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The orderly came over and sat down. "There's one condition," he said.

"What is it?" Smiddy asked suspiciously.

"I don't want you to call me Undertaker any more. Or a little rat. My name's Melvin. I want to be called Melvin."

They all stared at him as the simplicity as well as the complexity of his request registered on them. Then Connor and Aidman looked at Smiddy, who was the one most adamantly against outsiders. Civilians, as he called them. Smiddy studied the young man for a moment longer. Finally he extended his hand.

"Welcome to the squad, Melvin," he said.

The check arrived, and Undertaker—now Melvin—took it, bearing Connor's O. C. Cupant endorsement, to his bank and cashed it. He brought the money back to Room 131. "You'll have to hurry," he told the men. "I got called into the administrator's office on the way back. The F.B.I. can't understand why the check hasn't shown up yet. They're on their way over to question you guys—and me—right now."

Connor nodded crisply and turned to Aidman. "Reservation made?"

"Check. Non-stop to Paris. The plane leaves at two. He'll have to be at the airport by one-thirty."

"We'll need some way to get him off the hospital grounds without attracting attention."

"I can check out a hospital van," Melvin said.

"Good! Get it and meet us at the south corridor door."

Melvin hurried away. Connor wheeled across the room. "You guys pack his things," he said to Smiddy and Aidman. "I'll go to the solarium and get him."

Five minutes later, Connor returned with a puzzled Steve Crane. "What's going on? What are you guys doing with my things?"

"We found your girl, son," Smiddy told him. "And we're buying you a ticket to Paris."

Crane was dumbfounded. He stared at them incredulously.

"I sent her a cable an hour ago," Aidman told him. "She's meeting your plane in the morning."

"This must be some kind of dream," Crane said.

"It's real, buddy," Connor said nervously. "But you've got to hurry. There's a van waiting outside to take you to the airport. Come on, get dressed—"

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When Crane had his uniform on, they hustled him out to the van. To their surprise, old Smiddy climbed in with him. "I'm going to the airport to see him off," he announced.

"Are you crazy? In your robe and pajamas?"

Smiddy, as usual, was adamant. "I'm going."

"Hell, we'll *all* go then," Connor said.

They collapsed Connor's wheelchair and put it in the rear of the van. Melvin drove them off the hospital grounds. On the way out the gate, they passed a car with two men in the front seat. "Those are the F.B.I. guys," Melvin whispered.

On the way to the airport, Aidman handed Crane an envelope. "A thousand bucks," he said. "That'll pay for your ticket. First class. And there's a little extra that we packed in your duffle bag."

"Where the hell did you guys come up with that kind of money?" Crane asked suspiciously.

"We chipped in," Connor said over his shoulder.

"That's right," said Smiddy. "Even Melvin."

Crane frowned. "Melvin?"

"That's me," said the orderly. "My name wasn't really Undertaker."

Back at the hospital, the two F.B.I. agents went looking for Melvin to question him about the check.

"He signed out a van to take somebody to the airport," another orderly told them.

The agents hurried to Room 131. They found empty drawers standing open in one of the bureaus and the rest of the occupants missing.

Quickly they got back to their car and raced to the airport.

The group hurrying to the T.W.A. check-in gate received more than a few curious glances. Understandably. A shuffling old man, a younger bald man with a metal plate in his head, and a cripple in a wheelchair dressed in pajamas and robes, accompanied by a hospital orderly and a young army sergeant carrying a duffle bag. But the group didn't care; their only interest was getting their friend on the plane.

Their farewell was brief, a little awkward. "This is a pretty high price to pay for a lousy hospital room," Crane said. "I—I guess I won't be seeing you guys again." His voice choked a little.

"Sure you will," Smiddy assured him. "Old soldiers all go to the same place when they fade away. We'll be along—all of us."

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Crane shook hands with each of them, and with Melvin.

Outside, the F.B.I. men cruised the airport until they spotted the hospital van in front of the T.W.A. terminal. Quickly they parked next to it, collected two airport security men, and hurried inside. Methodically they began checking departure gates.

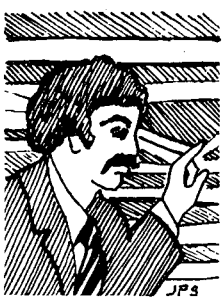
At the departure gate for the Paris flight, Steve Crane's four friends watched from an observation window as the big Boeing 747 taxied out to the runway and took off. They watched the plane until it was out of sight. Their faces were sad. But happy-sad.

As they turned to leave, they found the F.B.I. agents and airport security waiting for them.

Smiddy snorted audibly, squared his frail old shoulders, and shuffled proudly past them.

Connor lighted a cigar, said "Home, James," and sat back as Melvin pushed him along behind Smiddy.

Taking the tape player out of his robe pocket and switching it on to "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," Aidman brought up the rear.



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_____ Words at $1.35 each $.....

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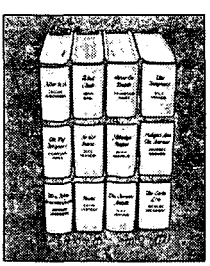

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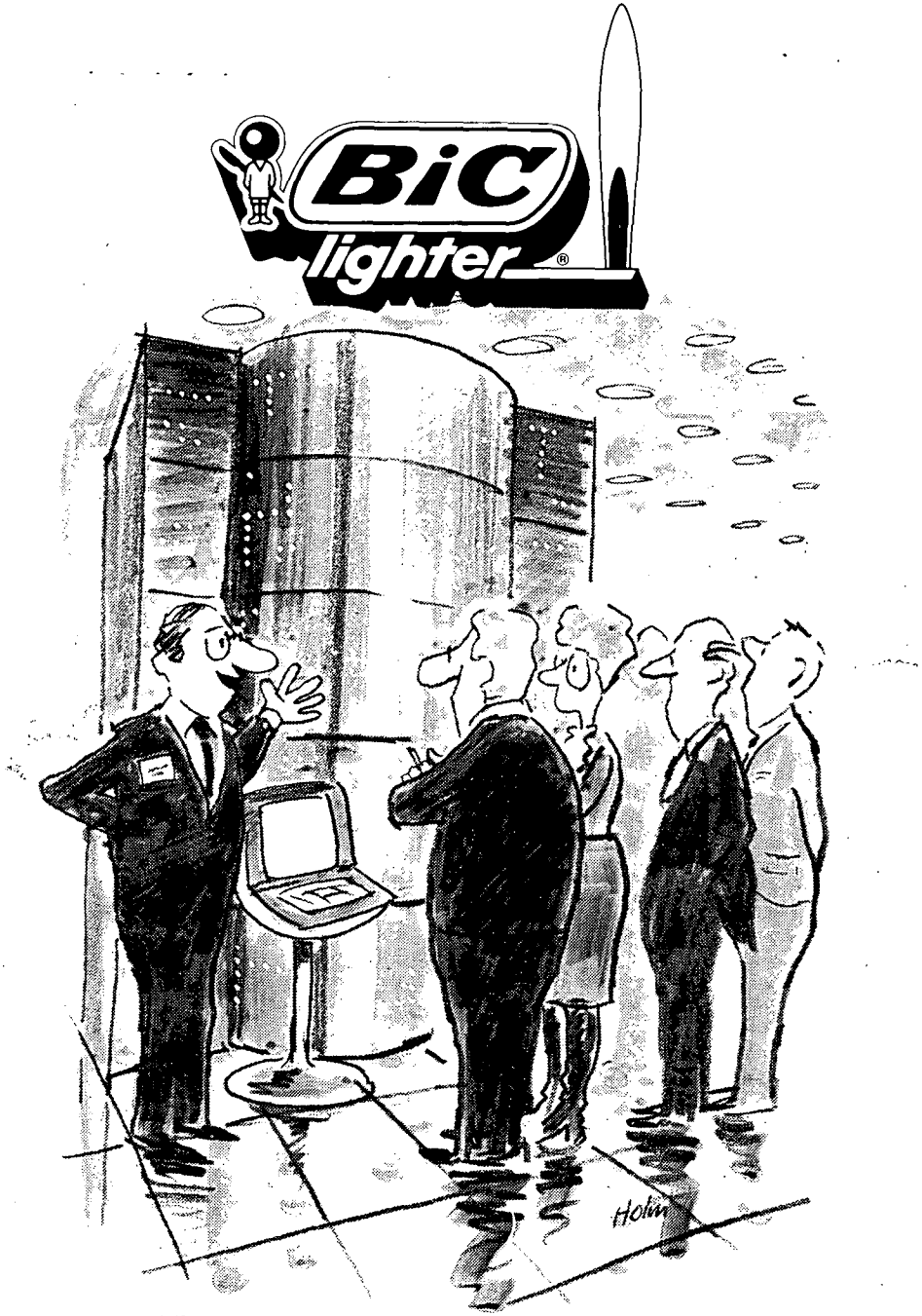

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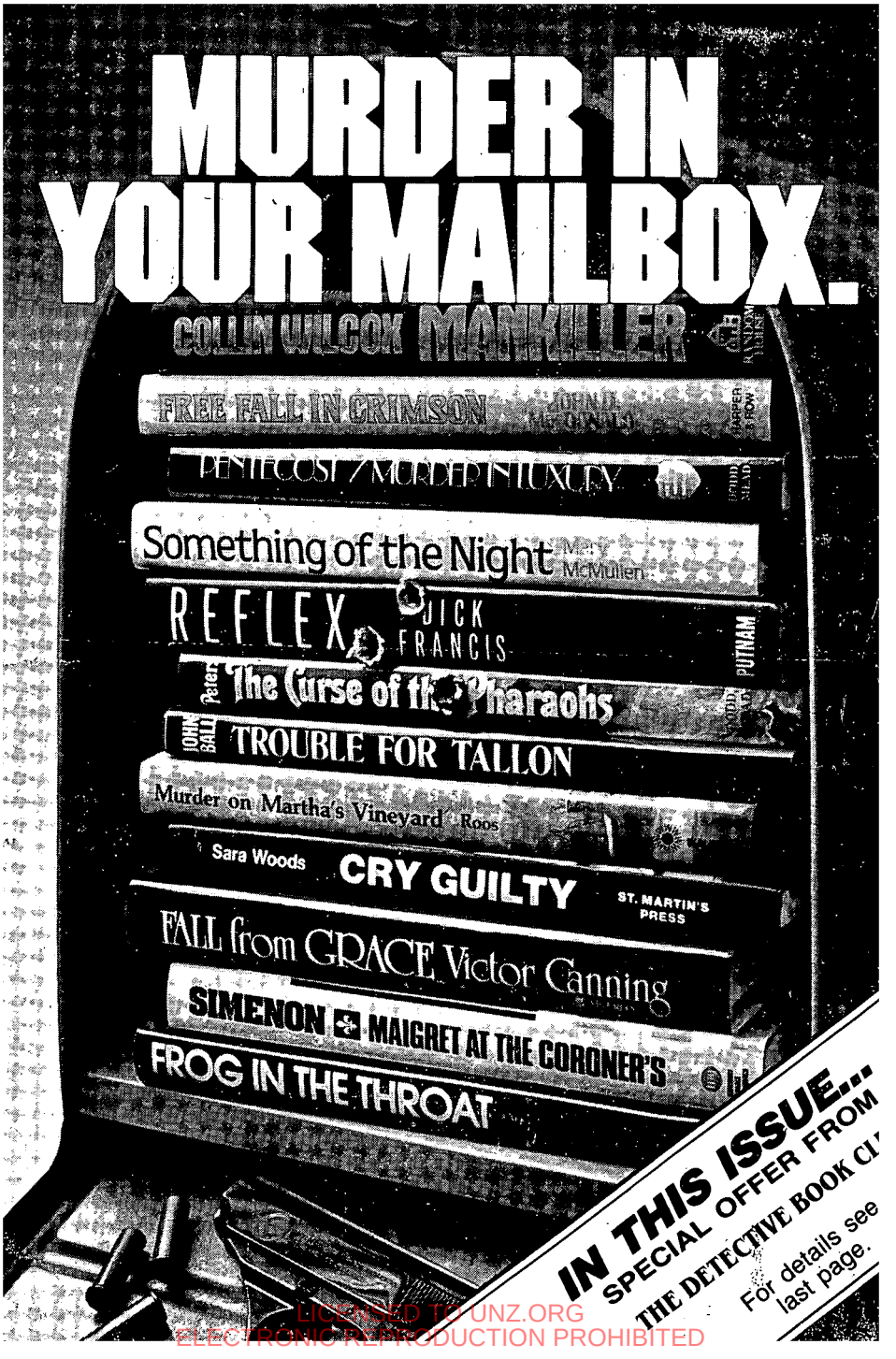

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